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THROUGH THE BREAKERS.

A. Robel,

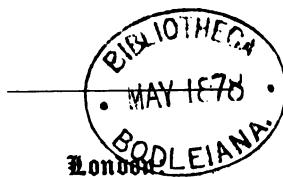
IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

REV. RICHARD BULKELEY,

Vicar of S. John's, Dukinfield.

VOL. III.



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THROUGH THE BREAKERS.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT were Reginald A'Bear's feelings as he sat during that long and weary night by the bedside of the sufferer, who was very restless, as the wounds were causing him considerable pain? Not very pleasurable, as may be supposed. When he had first met O'Connor, he had thought him a dying man, and was thankful that his wounds had turned out less dangerous than he had imagined ; but as he sat and watched his old friend Charlie, or administered to his wants, he remembered only too well that there had been a time

when he had wished that he might be slain by a Russian bullet. He knew that he was far from being out of danger, and that he might even yet die before his eyes—and the devil came again, but found him prepared for the encounter. He could not unthink the evil thought, but determined to make amends for it by striving to the utmost of his power, by careful nursing, to save O'Connor's life, and bring him back in safety to his betrothed.

After a few days the restlessness wore off, and it was evident that the patient was progressing favourably, when an event occurred which nearly caused a serious relapse.

Dreams are queer bedfellows, and these visions by the fancy bred, play many strange pranks with the brain of the powerless sleeper. Sometimes they have nothing whatever to do with any conceivable event that has ever happened to us, and might well, as our ancestors supposed, be brought about by some sportive imp whispering in the ear; sometimes our thoughts and doings during

the day are so impressed upon an over-excited brain, that they are re-produced during the succeeding night, and interrupt our much needed repose; while at other times thoughts and events of long ago are brought to our remembrance, as we react them in the hours of sleep; and one night, when worn out with anxiety and watching, Reginald had fallen asleep, he dreamt of long ago, of that time when he had lived a life in a single day, when he had first heard of O'Connor's engagement to Lorna Maitland.

O'Connor was awake, and feeling very thirsty; but seeing that his friend was asleep, had considerately refrained from waking him. But what has made the sufferer partly rise from his cot, and leaning on his unwounded arm, to gaze with curious and anxious glances at his sleeping friend? Reginald is talking in his sleep, and "Lorna," the name of his betrothed, is coming from his lips.

"She is false, I say!" he heard him mutter; "She must have known it—I have

always loved her—he must have known it too—he cannot love her as I do—faithless girl !” and then he muttered to himself again ; and O’Connor caught his own name, and that of his betrothed coming more than once from between his friend’s clenched teeth.

But the wounded man had heard enough—too much ; and he reclined on his cot again, and tried to think what could be the meaning of those ejaculations. One thing was only too evident, that Reginald, as he had once supposed, loved Lorna Maitland—that he had unknowingly, supplanted him ; and now he, the supplanter, was being generously nursed by the man whom he had so cruelly, though unintentionally wronged. And then again he asked himself, “ Did Reginald still love her whom he had treasured in his heart so long ? And was it all too true ? Could she have been false to her first love—have forgotten her former lover during the time he was away on the Continent, so that in pledging herself to him she had been false to some earlier

promise to the absentee?" What! Lorna, whom he had ever pictured to himself as everything that was pure, and good, and true—Lorna faithless, false, and treacherous? He felt that it could not be true; and yet, what else could be the meaning of those words which he had so lately heard, and which seemed almost to have set his brain on fire?

But his enfeebled and poor wounded body was unable to sustain a wounded mind also—the shock of the discovery was too much for him; it caused too severe a wrench to his nervous system, already strained severely..

When Reginald awoke, to his astonishment he found his friend, whom he had last seen progressing so favourably, in a state of delirium, and all the alarming symptoms of a serious relapse. In a moment he had summoned the crew, and while he cooled O'Connor's forehead, and tried such simple remedies as he knew, a boat left "The Peri's" side for the shore. Long Bob never pulled harder in a race than he did that night, for he felt that the young

officer's life depended on their exertions ; he received Reginald's orders to make any offer to the young surgeon to induce him to come out to the yacht, and had made up his mind not to return without him.

They had hardly left "The Peri's" side when the wounded man cried out in his delirium—

"I tell you it's a lie ! she does not love you ! Leave the room," he exclaimed with a shout, turning fiercely upon his friend ; "I don't want you any more. Do you hear ?" he said again, "I don't want you to wait upon me." And then, as Reginald, dumbfounded, and so taken by surprise, as almost to be rendered incapable of acting, tried to soothe him, he cried again, as he pushed him away—

"I tell you it's a lie ! she does not love you, and never did ; how dare you say that she is false ?" And then he began to call Lorna's name in piteous accents, and ask her to come to him, and say that she loved him, and tell him that it was not true. After a time he lay quiet again.

Reginald A'Bear had no idea that he had spoken in his sleep, and could not understand the meaning of the sudden change in his friend's condition, but supposed that O'Connor's words were merely the effect of delirium brought about by some alteration for the worse in the state of his wounds. How he blamed himself for those few hours' sleep. His punishment seemed greater than he could bear; had he only come to the Crimea just to see his old friend pass away before his eyes, accusing him to the very last? After all it was only a passing thought which he had thrust from him as soon as it had arisen; but when O'Connor commenced to rave again in much about the same terms, he could endure it no longer, and calling the elder Jarvis, told him to watch in the cabin, while he waited on the deck for the coming of the surgeon.

Under the influence of the cool night air, and refreshing sea breezes, his mind recovered its equilibrium, and leaning over "The Peri's" side, he listened anxiously for the

sound of the returning boat ; during those moments of suspense each minute seemed an hour. At last he heard the dash of the oars, and soon the boat was in sight, being rapidly propelled through the water in the direction of the yacht. It was with some difficulty that Long Bob could persuade the young surgeon to come. He found him in bed, a luxury which he had not enjoyed for some time, and having seen his patient on the previous morning, could not believe that he had suddenly become so much worse ; but as Long Bob tenaciously persisted, saying—

“ Yer see, as how I promised Mr. A’Bear not to return without yer, and come yer must, and if so be that yer won’t come no otherwise, me and Sambo ‘ull just have to carry yer down to the boat by main force—that’s plain.”

The thought of a surgeon of Her Majesty’s army being carried off screaming through a line of sentries tickled him so much, that he could not forbear a hearty laugh. This, as

may be supposed, made Bobby Smallman to wax wrath, and he was positively advancing to put his threat into execution, when the young surgeon sprang out of bed, saying—

“Paws off Pompey, and I’ll come with you as submissive as a lamb,” and as he slipped on his clothes, remarked, “I feel sure that your master is alarming himself unnecessarily; and it’s a shame to drag a poor fellow out of his bed on a fool’s errand.”

Bob merely answered with a grunt, and soon the two men were putting their backs into it, as they made the boat to fly through the waters of the harbour on their way back to “The Peri.” When the young surgeon entered the cabin and saw O’Connor’s condition, very glad he was that the waterman had been so tenacious, for he was seriously alarmed and perplexed at the state in which he found the young officer. He examined the wounds, but with the exception of a slight disarrangement of the bandages, they were going on as well as could be

expected, and he could not understand the cause of the present symptoms. He felt—for some of his brother surgeons had rather objected to the operation—that his professional reputation was at stake, for his patient had been going on so well, that he had rather crowded over it, and had indeed performed the operation on many others since. It was rather hard, then, to find that his prognosis, his art in foretelling the course and progress of the healing of the wound, through some unforeseen circumstance or other, had been at fault; and it was not less galling to him, as he stood in the cabin unable to divine the cause of the symptoms, to discover that his diagnosis was failing him also.

At length the patient began to rave again, and the young surgeon turning to Reginald A'Bear, asked him—

“ If O'Connor had received during the day a letter from home with unwelcome intelligence, or whether they had had any exciting conversation together? ”

"I can assure you," A'Bear answered, "that I am as ignorant as a babe unborn of the cause of the change. He was as cheerful as could be yesterday, but in no ways excited. When I went and looked at him before lying down last night, he was sleeping as calmly as an infant; but when I awoke again a few hours afterwards this sudden change for the worse had taken place. The only thing I can put it down to is the effect of nightmare."

As talking would not advantage matters, the surgeon at once cut off the curly locks, of that colour which Lorna had once thought so common, but had since learnt to love so well; and after using such remedies as he had brought with him, determined to stay with the patient some time, to see what turn affairs would take. Shortly after the sun rose, O'Connor fell into a fitful slumber, and the young surgeon left, "saying that if any more unfavourable symptoms should appear they were to send for him immediately; but that he had every hope that the

relapse was not so serious as he had at first expected. Sambo and the waterman rowed him back again, but much more leisurely; as he was about to leave the boat, he took some money out of his pocket, and offered it to Long Bob, with the remark—

“That whenever he had to send any orders, he only wished that he could command the services of such a messenger.”

Long Bob touched his cap, but refused the money, observing that “he did not want to be paid for doing his duty, and that if he had acted any otherwise he would not have been worth his salt.” As the surgeon was moving off, he sung out after him—“No offence, sir; if yer hadn’t come in another minute, we should have had yer out of bed, and down to the boat; so I hope yer’ll trust an honest man’s word for the future.”

The young surgeon only laughed, and walked on, and notwithstanding his want of rest during the preceding night, bent his steps towards the hospitals.

Reuben Jarvis, however, had his own ideas of the matter; but as he did not think that he would get much sympathy from any one on board, not even from his brother, he had kept it to himself. It was evident to him that young Mr. O'Connor had been "*overzeed*" during the night by some one or other, and whilst in the cabin had done his best to counteract the spell. A pigeon cut in half and applied warm to the soles of the feet would have been the most efficacious remedy; but as that was out of the question, waving his hand three times over the place he had said a charm, which he had learnt from Nix Jarvis' old mother, to prevent the wounds from bleeding afresh, which, from O'Connor's struggles, was not unlikely to happen. It ran as follows—

"And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thy blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.

"*And as once the river of Jordan stood,
So with a word too shall thy blood.'*"

At one time he had been subject to fits, and thirty maidens had met him after service one Sunday afternoon, in the porch of Malborough church, and as he passed between them in solemn silence they had each presented him with a penny. With the thirty pence he had procured a half-crown, which a silversmith in Kingsbridge had fashioned into a ring—or rather was supposed to have made that use of it; but in reality he had kept the half-crown as payment, and made it out of a piece of an old silver spoon. This the young man had ever since worn, and believed in it implicitly as a most potent spell. When in the cabin he had serious thoughts of transferring it for a time to the young officer's fingers; but dreaded the laughter of his mates, besides which he noticed that he had already, what was doubtless a most powerful spell of his own in the diamond ring.

As O'Connor was but little better on the following day, he went to Balaclava and

procured a black fowl, and as soon as the rest of the crew had departed for the shore with the intention of visiting Sebastopol, and trying to obtain some trophy of the siege, he set to work in the most business like manner to counteract the evil one. Having first decapitated the chicken and immediately cut out the heart, which he stuck full of pins, he proceeded to roast it with the heart inside. This he found some difficulty in doing, owing to the cooking arrangements on board, which were not very suitable for roasting ; and when his back was turned, the unfortunate chicken fell from the string to which it was tied. This was confirmation evident of the truth of his suspicions, and the powers of the spell ; he tied it up again, and when the cooking was finished to his satisfaction, quietly chucked the body overboard.

Towards evening the spoilers returned ; Long Bob, with a rough chair of Russian manufacture on his head, for himself, and

under his arm a picture of the Czar Nicholas, for Sally, and the others with some vile daubs of Russian saints in gilt frames, which, as they were thought to be pictures of the late occupants of the houses from whence they had been taken, were considered evident proof by the marauders, that "the Roosians were precious odd fishes."

During the two following days O'Connor continued more or less feverish and light-headed, but on the third morning, after a long and refreshing sleep, he awoke once more himself again. When Reginald had arisen—for he also had rather overslept himself—seeing that O'Connor was still asleep, he had quietly slipped out; but on his return found that his old friend was awake, and that the glare of temporary insanity had departed from his eye. He at once went to his side, and without any allusion to his relapse, asked how he felt after such a long and comfortable sleep.

"I cannot make it out, Reggie," the sick

man answered in a faint voice, "I feel so much weaker this morning."

" You have no business to, then," his friend rejoined. " Why, you are pounds better this morning than you were yesterday."

O'Connor pointed to his head, as though to inquire what had become of his hair.

" Yes, we were obliged to cut away the curls, as you see, for you were a little light-headed. You have not been quite the thing during the last few days; but you will soon be all right again now, and I have put away the curls most carefully for Lorna. I have a good mind, as it is a bright warm day, to give you a little fresh air on deck on my own responsibility. What do you say about it?"

But his patient did not seem to heed the question, for he asked—

" Was it only a dream, then, after all?"

" I don't know what you are alluding to; but there is one thing quite certain, I am not going to talk to you about anything until

you have had your breakfast, and then I shall take you on deck, and you may ask me any questions, or tell me anything you like, if you promise to be quiet. You are under my charge, and how am I ever to take you home safely, if you are constantly going to take all sorts of queer notions into your head, and keep us all awake and on the tiptoe of anxiety for days together? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why, if you go on at this rate, you'll make my hair grey by Christmas. Lie down, sir, like a good boy, and your breakfast will soon be ready."

With a smile—but how unlike the beam of jollity that used to light up his old merry face—he did as he was told; and about an hour afterwards was sitting on the deck, well wrapped up in blankets, and propped up with pillows.

"Now then, Charlie," his friend began, after the invalid had taken a good look at the varied objects around, "I am quite ready to hear any confessions, or to answer any

questions. You have evidently something on your mind, and you will never be well until you have got rid of it."

"Perhaps it was a dream, after all," he answered, "but I hardly think it was; it has been far too vividly impressed upon my mind and memory."

"Dream or no dream, tell me what it was," Reginald replied, "and perhaps I may turn out to be a second Daniel, able to interpret the vision."

O'Connor at once began, and told him the whole story; how he had heard him talking in his sleep, and that the suddenness of the unexpected revelation had been too much for him, and his shattered nerves must have given way beneath it. "I could not bear even to think for a moment," he finished, "that Lorna had been false to you, or that I should seem even to be a traitor;" and as he concluded, the blood rushed into his haggard face, and he put his hand to his head and looked very much as though he were going to faint.

"Now, look here, Charlie," Reginald responded, "if you are going on in this way, I shall just have to take you down into the cabin again, and treat you like a naughty child; but if you will listen like a sensible man, I will soon relieve your mind; and then you must soon repay us for the fright which you have put us all into during the last three days, by getting well again as soon as you can. It was a dream then, after all, and I was the dreamer. The explanation will be easy enough. I used to talk in my sleep as a boy, ever since the shipwreck; you remember that I occasionally indulged in the habit at Woolhurst, and it seems that I was at my old tricks again the other night." He then began in his turn and told him all, and as he brought the story to an end, said, "I never thought, except during the first hour or two, that you had been a traitor or that Lorna had been false to me; if I had reflected for a moment I should have seen that I had no ground whatever for the accusation.

You may make yourself quite easy. I love her no longer as I once did, my feelings towards her are those of a brother and nothing more ; and all I am anxious for now is to merit your gratitude and her's by taking you home in safety, and to give myself the pleasure of standing best man to you on your wedding day. Of course it was a hard trial at first, and indeed for some time I was nearly conquered once or twice ; but now that the victory has been won, I am none the worse for the battle."

When he had finished, the invalid remained silently gazing over the side of the vessel for some time, but Reginald could see by his face how greatly his mind had been relieved.

At length O'Connor turned and held out his hand to his friend, which was warmly grasped, as he said in a voice tremulous with emotion—

"A'Bear, you are one in a thousand. I could not have acted as you have ; instead of nursing you I should have wished you dead a

thousand times. But you were always different, even at Woolhurst, to most other men. I wish I had the same principles."

"Ah! but you don't know what thoughts may have been in my mind; there was a time when I could have killed you had we met."

"But they could only have been there for a very short time. It is fellows like you who persuade us worldly men to be Christians; however much we may discredit what is said, when we see the matter plainly laid out in a person's life it is an argument that cannot be confuted. It seems to me as though I were to be for ever doing you injuries, and that you were to be for ever showing me kindnesses in return. I was the cause of your leaving Woolhurst, and you pay my debts; and then, after doing you the very worst injury possible, you pay me out by nursing me, and saving my life."

"Well then, the advantage is all on my side, so that need not trouble you, if there be

any truth in the old saying, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’’ Be a kind and loving husband to Lorna, and let us always be friends, and I shall be sufficiently rewarded.”

“No fear of that,” he replied; and then added after a pause, “poor little Lorny, she will find her presentiments verified at last.”

“What were they?” asked his friend.

O’Connor told him of her feelings the night of the ball, of her thoughts suggested by Byron’s “eve of the battle.”

“Too true of many a poor fellow, but not of you,” Reginald quickly observed. “I hope she may receive my letter before she sees your name among the list of wounded; at any rate she cannot be kept in suspense for very long, and I will write again this afternoon, and say how well you are going on.”

They had been talking so earnestly that the approach of a boat had not been perceived until its bow had grated against “The Peri’s” side. Almost immediately afterwards

the cheery face of the young doctor was seen as he sprang upon the deck.

“Now doctor, mind, no blowing up, although I have acted against your orders,” said the head nurse, as he advanced to meet him; “your patient has taken a decided turn for the better again.”

“I shall make no rash promises,” he answered; but, as soon as he had felt O’Connor’s pulse, said, “I think we may congratulate ourselves upon being out of the enemy’s clutches at last; but we must make up our minds not to have another relapse.”

“I can answer for that,” interrupted Reginald; “and before you go I have a question or two to ask you. How soon will O’Connor be fit to go into the trenches again?”

“Go into the trenches again? Is the man mad? What you have to do is to get him home as soon as you can—I only wish that I had half as good a reason—and then there will be time enough to talk about returning again.”

“That’s one point settled, doctor, and you

must give him a certificate to that effect; and the next is simply this, How soon may we start? For to make the cure complete it will be necessary for him to breathe some South Devon air, and to have advice from a certain female member of the faculty who lives in those parts."

"Ah! I see now how it was that my diagnosis proved wrong," the young surgeon answered smiling. "I ought to have taken into account the cardiac symptoms. You must wait, though, for a few days longer, and if he still continues to improve, I shall not be long in giving my permission."

In little more than another week, "The Peri" had left her moorings, and moved by a fresh autumnal breeze, was swiftly cutting her way through the waters of the Black Sea in the direction of the Bosphorus; while O'Connor, the only idle man on board, looking wonderfully revived, was earnestly gazing in the direction of Sebastopol. As the yacht moved out of the harbour and gained

the open sea, he saw over the stronghold of the stubborn Muscovite the flags of the allied armies waving; and thought what a vast amount of treasure had been spent, what fearful sufferings had been endured, of which his own had been but like a drop in the ocean, and how many precious lives had been sacrificed during the past year before the end had been obtained; and though a shade of sadness passed across his face, as he thought of the many friends left behind, buried beneath the soil of the Chersonese, his eyes lit up with a soldier's pride as he remembered the part that he had played in the mighty conflict.

In the midst of his meditations, Reginald came across from a conversation with Reuben Jarvis, and said—

“ That's right, Charlie, take a good look at the place, as you will never see it again.”

“ I wish I was quite so sure of that; but who knows that I may not have to come out again in the spring for a campaign in the Crimea, or another march to Moscow ?”

"Not you," he replied, "peace will be concluded long before that."

"I am sure I hope that it may with all my heart; a year in the trenches is a sickener and no mistake, and now to feel that I am really going home—I never knew the real import of the word before." He stooped down, and as he patted Nettle—Rufford's legacy—who seemed to partake of the general joyfulness on board, said, "Poor Bob, I wish I could have brought you too."

Bob had succumbed to the hard work of the previous winter; but he had preserved the greater part of his mane as a memorial, which, afterwards made into a bracelet, with a fastening of gold set with turquoises, was Lorna's favourite ornament. Tchernaya was still in existence, wonderfully improved by a season of rest and good food, and his new master had put him on board a returning merchantman a few days before.

No particular incident marked their homeward voyage, except that after passing be-

tween Cerigo and the Morea in a mist, as they were rounding Cape Matapan, they were nearly run into by a steamer; the only evil consequences being a vast expenditure of bad language. They stopped at Constantinople, Malta, and Gibraltar, for the purpose of obtaining fresh water and provisions; and from Malta letters were sent to England, with tidings of their homeward movements.

Each day O'Connor grew stronger and stronger, and when "The Peri," anchored behind the breakwater in Plymouth Bay he was almost convalescent; each day, too, the longing for a sight of the shores of Old England grew more intense. His heart beat quicker and quicker as the first land was sighted, the blue line of the Tors of Dartmoor, then the grey outline of the Start. What were his thoughts and sensations, as from "The Peri's" deck gliding swiftly o'er the waters of the Channel on the way to Plymouth, just before the sun went down, he managed with the aid of a telescope to make out the village

of Sandstone, and the house where Lorna dwelt, can only be imagined by those who have ever been in a similar situation, or have not forgotten the feelings of a lover's heart. One of those on board, at any rate, seemed to be able to enter into them, for as soon as the village of Hope came in sight, the younger Jarvis struck up a song in which all joined in the chorus, a favourite one in those parts—

“There's a fisherman's daughter,
And she lives o'er the water,
And she's going to get married next Sunday to me.”

CHAPTER II.

OCTOBER had come, and the yew trees in the neighbourhood of Sandstone (for it is a thinly wooded district, what an American would call a “fine cleared country”) were clothed with the varied tints of Autumn. It was not cold, however; the day was as warm and the air as soft as in the early summer time, without those sensations of oppression and languor which had characterised the tropical heat of August and July. It was the commencement of S. Luke’s little summer, and Lorna, returned from visiting a sick member of her father’s flock in a distant part of the parish, was just entering the house when she saw the post-woman coming. The “Times” of the previous day, and a letter from Edric to her mother,

were the contents of the post-bag. Mrs. Maitland was giving the final touches with a needleful of silk to a rose, and as there were only a few more stitches wanting to complete it, Lorna put the letter on the work table and opened the paper. The news of the capture of Sebastopol had been known by telegraph for some days, and she expected to find some further details. Her lover had passed through so many dangers unscathed that she had almost ceased to think of the possibility of his being hurt ; but when a long list of killed and wounded was the first piece of news which met her eyes, it was not without considerable anxiety that she commenced to read through the names.

As soon as her mother had finished the rose, she quietly opened the letter from her son. It was to say that he had seen the news of O'Connor's wounds in the previous day's paper, and telling her to break the news gently to his sister. Mrs. Maitland read no more ; but it was too late, her child had already seen

the fatal intelligence—"Captain Charles H. O'Connor, Royal Artillery, wounded dangerously in two places"—and was standing, pale as death, gazing at the sad news in the cruel sheet, looking like one stunned with some sudden and unexpected blow. The print had vanished from her sight, but she did not faint, she did not cry; she just stood like some marble statue graven by a cunning sculptor from the purest block out of the quarries of *Ægean* Paros to represent dismay, or hopeless grief, or both.

Her mother led her to a seat and lighted the fire—for Lorna was as cold as ice—and tried to comfort her. But words seemed of no avail; and while her mother, gentle heart, was weeping as she chafed her hands and warmed her feet, the fountain of her daughter's tears seemed dried up by the crushing news, and she just sat on gazing vacantly before her, unable to be comforted. Only a few days previously she had received a letter from her lover, full of hope, with the news that he had

just been promoted to the rank of Captain, and another from Reginald saying that he had never seen her Charlie in better health; and now to read at last that he was wounded—dangerously—and in two places—a climax of ill news which seemed altogether to forbid hope. She thought—no, she felt, that he was gone; that she would never see him more; that he was most likely by this time buried in some sepulchre in that distant land which she could never even weep over; and those crushing words, “wounded dangerously, in two places,” seemed stamped upon the retina of her eyes, written on her brain, and graven on her heart—wherever she looked she could see nought else. If it had merely said that he was wounded she might have hoped; or even if dangerously had been only added, she would not have utterly despaired; but in *two places*—that shut out all expectation of any better news.

“Sweet hope! kind cheat!” saith one; but those last three words had prevented “the

sweet daughter of faith " from exercising even the lowest of her attributes ; and as Mrs. Maitland tried to cheer her daughter, she feared when at length her child spoke that her thoughts were only too likely to be true ; and, as she held her tighter to her heart, Lorna, with a sigh of weariness, laid her head upon her mother's shoulder—but though there were tears upon her daughter's cheek, they were not her own.

Dinner came, and Lorna eat mechanically what was placed before her, and though the maid could hardly wait from sympathetic sorrow, yet her young mistress shed not a single tear—the sudden shock, the overwhelming nature of her sorrow, had frozen those natural safety-valves of a woman's grief. When dinner was over, she went back to her place by the fire and sat on as before, and Mrs. Maitland went again to her child and tried to comfort her. " There is hope yet, my darling child," she said, " Reggie is with him we know, and he will soon write. Perhaps it

may be better than we expect. God has sent the trial, my love, you must not be rebellious to His will ; we have only received good thus far at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not now submissively receive the evil too ? ”

“ I am not rebellious, mother dear,” she answered, while as a shiver passed through her frame she laid her weary and throbbing head upon her mother’s shoulder again ; “ but I have no hope, no hope.” Mrs. Maitland felt her feverish hands and burning brow, and feared for her daughter’s brain, that it might give way as that of many another under the severity of the blow, or even that she might lose her altogether. “ Weep, weep, my child, weep upon your mother’s heart,” she cried, as her own tears began to flow afresh, while she strained her closer to her breast.

“ I cannot weep,” she said ; “ perhaps I shall by and by ; but I have such a pain here ” —and she put her hand on her heart.

Mr. Maitland had gone to Kingsbridge on business early in the morning, and was to be

home again by tea-time ; but his wife could endure the suspense no longer, and she quietly went out and sent off a messenger to her husband to tell him of Lorna's state of mind, and to advise him to bring their medical man back with him ; but he was already on the way home with the only medicine likely to do her any real good, viz., the letter from their kind and faithful friend Reginald A'Bear.

He had also seen the intelligence early in the morning, but instead of returning at once, as he had at first determined, resolved to wait until the second post came in, in case there might be a letter in the evening, as the postmaster told him that there had been no Crimean letter for Sandstone that morning. As soon as he had received the welcome epistle—and the fact that it was directed to Lorna and not to him, spoke volumes of hope—he started for home ; and the pony who was usually accustomed to have pretty much of his own way, could by no means understand the cause of such unwelcome flagel-

lations as he received to urge him beyond his usual creeping pace. At the top of West Alvington Hill he met the messenger, whom he directed to hasten on for the doctor, and off the boy set down the steep hill, reckless of any possible contingencies to horse or rider, at a pace that would have astonished a dweller in the plains.

When Mr. Maitland arrived at the Vicarage, and had given the pony to the maid, who was quite equal on occasions to act the part of groom, having been brought up at a farm, he entered the house.

As soon as Lorna heard her father's step she looked up eagerly, and the mother hoped that her husband might be able to accomplish what she had failed in doing, viz., to give consolation to their child. Mrs. Maitland met her husband at the hall door, and when she saw the letter, hoped for the best ; they agreed that it would be better to give it to her at once, and entering the dining room, he went up to her, and putting his arm round her,

kissed her fondly as he said, " My dear child, I have brought you a letter from Kingsbridge which came by the second post. It is from Reginald A'Bear, and as it is addressed to you, I hope it may contain good news ; would you like to open it, or shall I open it for you ? "

She could not answer him, but clung to him convulsively.

" Try and be calm, my dear child," he said, and beckoning to his wife, gave his daughter into her arms.

It was with a tremulous hand that he opened it, while he prayed to God to strengthen them all in this great trial. There was no need, however, to read further than the first few lines ; indeed he could not, his own eyes were blinded with emotion.

" Thank God ! " he fervently exclaimed ; and went and knelt down by his daughter's side, and told her that her Charlie's life had been mercifully preserved, that his wounds had been dressed and were going on favourably,

and that Reginald was nursing him on board his own yacht.

What sorrow could not do, joy could. It broke through the barriers of ice, the locked-up reservoirs burst forth, and long and hysterically Lorna wept. When she grew a little calmer, her father knelt by her side again, and poured out on their behalf the united praises of three grateful hearts. When the medical man arrived he found that his patient had been already put to bed, and that the symptoms which had so frightened her mother were already passing away. That same evening, after tea, Mr. Maitland, while his wife commenced another rose in the piece of work upon which she was engaged, read and re-read to them Reginald A'Bear's letter. It told them of the successful and clever operation, and it concluded by saying that if Lorna could endure the thought of seeing her Charlie with a stiff arm, as he would most likely be obliged to return home for a time, she might consider the wound as a most merciful dispensation of

Providence which would remove him out of harm's way for some time to come, for many a day at least.

"Papa," she said, when he had concluded, "you don't think that I acted very wickedly this morning, do you; indeed, I could not help it. When the first news came, I was not able to think properly, and indeed it seemed impossible to hope."

"No, my dear child; I do not think that you could help it; as you say, it came upon you so suddenly that you had not time to think aright. When I first saw Captain O'Connor's name, I thought there was little hope either; but I hope that both you and Charlie (for Lorna had immediately corrected him) will both show your gratitude in the days to come. It is indeed, wonderful, as we read the accounts of the many who have fallen, to think that so many have lived to tell the tale, and he seems to have been in the very thick of it, too; let me see, this is the third time that his life has been mercifully preserved during

the past year—it ought to make him a changed man."

"Why, papa, you don't think that he is a"—she could not think of an adjective appropriate; but her father, understanding her thought, answered—

"No, my love; but I don't call Captain O'Connor altogether a religious man, he has high principles, or else I should never have promised my little girl to him, and I hope that this sickness, with Reginald's nursing, may show him the better way."

She did not immediately reply, but after a pause, thinking her thoughts aloud, said—

"It seems like what we read of in books, to think that Reggie should be nursing him!"

Mrs. Maitland had, some time before, told her husband what had been the nature of his old pupil's feelings towards Lorna, and he understood, therefore, the underlying thought that prompted the words.

"I cannot say," he rejoined, "whether it is like what you read of in books, but it is a

truly noble and Christian action. When I think of Reginald A'Bear as I first saw him in the old farmhouse on the Sewers—a timid, shrinking little boy, nervous to a degree from the fearful scenes which he had been through, then as the wayward, vacillating, undecided youth, easily led astray ; then by the grace of God gradually conquering his faults ; and now, grown to the full stature of a man, mentally and morally, able and willing to perform such a truly noble and Christian act, and I verily believe, delighting in having the opportunity—I feel proud in having had some little to do in laying the foundation of his character, and I know that he will take no credit to himself whatever, and will feel that he is only doing his duty. No wonder that dear old Mrs. A'Bear is so proud of him. By the way," he added, "I think we are all very selfish; of course she will like to hear the news, too," and quickly getting his hat and stick, he was off to Burrscombe, where he said much about the same over again, and

gladdened the heart of the old lady, who of course agreed with every word.

Lorna, by the doctor's orders, was kept very quiet for the next week, very anxious for another letter, but comforting herself with the thought that "no news was good news." Then came the second letter from Reginald, with the assurance of the satisfactory progress towards convalescence of the wounded man; then a third from Charlie himself, with the news that they were on the point of starting for old England; and almost directly afterwards a fourth from Malta, showing that they were thus far on their journey. And now, Lorna, quite recovered, spent much of her time, as it was fine weather, in the old, familiar, favourite nook, and with a telescope examined all the yacht-like vessels that were passing towards Plymouth. As it happened, the yacht went by unperceived by her, for it was getting late when "The Peri" hove in sight off Sandstone, but old Nix had made her out from the highlands above Hope, and

came down in the evening with the intelligence, so that Lorna was prepared over night for the coming joy of the morrow.

That evening, when she came to say good-night to her father, he took her face between his hands, and looking fondly and earnestly into her eyes, said—

“The trials are nearly over now, and I don’t think you look any the worse for them.”

“I know I ought to be better for them, and I hope I am. I can see what you are thinking about; you are thinking that I failed when the great trial came, that I ought to have been more patient and hopeful. Did I disappoint you very much?”

He only answered with a kiss, and Lorna, sitting down on the stool at his feet, a clear sign that she intended to have an earnest chat with him, looked for a moment into the fire to collect her thoughts, and then commenced, “Do you remember, papa, when you asked me at Aunt Ellen’s, how I should feel if you were to tell me that I was never to see

Charlie again, and I said that ' I should be very sorry ? '

Her father nodded.

" But if you were to ask me now, I should have to say something quite different. Do you know, I don't think I could do without Charlie now."

" But suppose, my child, God had taken him from you, instead of restoring him to health ? "

" But you see, God has brought him back to me in safety. Now this is what I want to speak to you about. I have been thinking about it all day. Do you think that it is possible to be too happy ? Ever since that first letter came, and especially since I knew that " The Peri " had really started, I seem to have only one idea—I dream about it all night, I think about it all day ; and that is about seeing Charlie to-morrow. I tried to paint to-day, but I only spoilt a sheet of paper, and had to tear it up, and then I tried to learn a German hymn by heart, but I had to give it up.

Now, papa, do you think it wrong to think about it so much?"

"Thoughts are very difficult things to manage," her father replied; "of course it is wrong to let any earthly object engross all our thoughts; it is like putting that thing or that person in the place of God; but it is not for me to judge you, my child. I remember how I felt when you were born, and thought that I was about to lose your mother—but there," he said, pointing to the clock, "it is time to be off." And as he gave her a kiss, said, "you mean to tell some one else about it when you get into your room alone."

She understood his meaning, and followed his advice, and not only so, but prayed also for her lover and their faithful friend. When she rose from her knees, she sat for some time by the toilette table, with her head leaning on her hand; the nature of her thoughts, as her brain communed with her heart may be surmised; amongst other things, she wondered whether it would have been wrong to have

prayed that Reginald and Gerty might some day be married ; but she sighed when she considered how that everything seemed against it.

* * * * *

As it was somewhat late in the day when "The Peri" ran into Plymouth Bay, she anchored for the night just within the breakwater ; but with the dawn of the next day, Reuben Jarvis, as the wind was favourable, weighed anchor, and "The Peri," passing between the Citadel and Mount Batten, the Fisher's Nose and Bear's Head, was, before long, snugly berthed alongside of the new wharf in Sutton's Pool. The motion of the vessel, as she left her moorings, and glided o'er the waters of the bay, aroused the sleepers. It was not the time to think of an extra turn, if that had been possible in their narrow cots, and the two friends were quickly on deck. The day of his happiness had really come at last, and as "The Peri" tacked when opposite the Citadel, and answered her helm in the direction of the cutwater,

O'Connor noticed, as she changed her course, that they were exactly opposite the seat where he had sat with Lorna on that eventful morning when he had told her the secret of his love—no, the story; for that was not a secret which was known already. One, two, three, nearly four years had passed since then, but long as they had appeared during that weary, dreary waiting time, now that they were gone, they seemed only like so many days, while the few hours that would have to elapse before he could reach Sandstone, seemed suddenly, to his impatient heart, to have expanded into days and weeks. Had it been any one but his friend A'Bear he would have felt inclined to have quarrelled with him; for instead of starting for Sandstone the very moment they touched dry land, Reginald would persist, with most strange perversity, in ordering a considerable portion of their baggage to be taken on shore and wheeled up to the "Royal;" and not until after a complete renovation of their toilettes,

and when a hearty breakfast had been consumed, did he give orders for a post-chaise to be brought round; having, however, already seen that another pair of horses had been sent on, so that they might travel at a good pace all the way.

O'Connor resigned himself to his fate as best he could, and did ample justice, under the cruel circumstances of the case, to the substantial and appetizing viands before them. To the only remonstrance he made, Reginald answered—

“ No, Charlie, I am inexorable ; you are under my charge until I have given you into the hands of your new nurse ; when you are under Lorna’s eye, and not till then, I shall surrender my responsibility ; and very glad indeed shall I be to wash my hands of you altogether, for you have been a most unruly patient during the last week. A pretty thing, indeed, to think that I was going to take you a drive of twenty miles on an empty stomach ; why, I should have you dying of inanition on

the way, or fainting at the end of the journey. Very poetical, no doubt, but a most insane and unpractical proceeding ; so you must make up your mind to the most disagreeable proceeding of eating a good breakfast before starting."

Before another hour had elapsed they were on the road, and as the sun dial in the old churchyard began to point to the middle of the day, the sea was again in sight as they were descending the road towards Sandstone.

Lorna, too, had been quite as anxious for the meeting, and often as she listened eagerly during that long, long morning, said to herself, like Sisera's mother, " Why is his chariot so long in coming, why tarry the wheels of his chariot ?" At last the sound of wheels was heard coming down the road ; she hastened to the hall door, but only to see the doctor in his carriage, who gave her a pleasant nod as he rattled by.

" Fancy, not knowing the sound of the doctor's vehicle, and mistaking it for a post-chaise," said her father, with a smile.

After a long half-hour, she heard again the rumble of a coming conveyance ; it made too much noise for a dog-cart, but not enough for a wagon. It must be them ; but no, it was only the baker's cart from Kingsbridge. At length, however, there was another sound, there were evidently two horses this time ; directly afterwards the boy, who was also on the watch, appeared at the gateway, and as he swung it open, shouted, "Here they bees, miss." The carriage turned the corner. Lorna was trembling so with the excitement of joy and happiness that she could hardly stand, and the next moment was strained to her Charlie's heart with her arms around his neck. Mr. and Mrs. Maitland then came forward and welcomed him, and immediately afterwards, as if by mutual consent, Lorna and her mother exclaimed—

"But where is Reggie?"

"He got out at the top of the hill to go to Burrscombe, and the carriage is to return there at once with his traps ; but as soon as

Mrs. A'Bear can spare him, he is coming on here."

The fact of the matter being that Reginald had three reasons for getting out at the top of the hill ; the first was that he felt it was his duty to go to Burrscombe, and see his dear old grandmother before any one else ; the second, that he thought Charles O'Connor and Lorna might naturally like to have the first hour to themselves without the intervention of a third person ; and the third, and perhaps the real reason, though he would not have allowed it for a moment, was that he was not at all sure, notwithstanding all his philosophy, what might be the nature of his feelings if he was a witness of their first meeting.

As soon as the carriage had gone, Lorna helped her lover to take his coat off, and then noticed, for the first time, that his arm was still in a bandage, and hanging stiffly by his side. But what did she care for that—it was something to be proud of, rather than sorry

for—and she was sitting a few minutes afterwards by his side on an ottoman before a cosy fire in the drawing room, listening intently to the story of the last few weeks, with his poor hand clasped in hers, sadly withered, but on which shone brightly as ever the diamond ring, the pledge of their betrothal, and his comforter in many a dark and dismal scene.

When Reginald A'Bear came down to the vicarage, he brought from his grandmother an invitation for the whole party to come to dinner in the evening, which was gladly accepted. His welcome may be imagined, for O'Connor had told them everything, and they knew that he owed his life to his friend's careful nursing. He did not stay very long, and as "Tchernaya" arrived from London in the afternoon, all the better for his trip by sea, he went for a long ride, and only came back just in time to dress for dinner.

"Now, Lorna," he said, when he had finished carving a turkey, of his old nurse's

fattening, "as I hope by this time you are equal to imparting a little information, how about Edric and Winnifred, to begin with?"

"Edric is trying for a school in the North of England, and if he should be successful, and he fancies that he has a good chance, he and Winny are to be married in the spring."

She was sitting on his left, and he whispered—

"I suppose that I must not ask in what capacity you hope to act on that occasion, whether it is to be a double event, or not?"

She blushed, as her father observed—

"You will be glad to hear that Edric has at length resolved to be ordained; I cannot say what pleasure his determination has given me."

"I expected as much from what he said in his last letter; and, by the way, what has become of Gerty? I think it is very neglectful on the part of you all, for no one to have thought of asking her to meet us."

Mr. and Mrs. Maitland and his grandmother

looked up with astonishment, while Lorna put down her knife and fork, as she exclaimed, gazing with surprise, first at Reginald and then at O'Connor—

“Why, you don’t mean to say that neither of you know anything about it?”

“What do you mean?” they both called out, astonished, in their turn.

“Did you not receive Gerty’s letter before you left the Crimea?”

“Yes, I received one about a fortnight before we sailed—but I am not at all sure that it was not three weeks—there were great complaints after the fall of Sebastopol about the irregularity of the mails, and loss of letters; one of yours never came to hand, and I suppose hers must have been lost among the rest; but what has happened, nothing very dreadful, I hope?”

“She has gone out to the Crimea as a nurse,” Lorna replied, watching Reginald’s face attentively to see the effect of her words.

For the moment they looked like some

happy family in Sebastopol, suddenly disturbed by the advent of a Lancaster shell, as the two newly returned voyagers exclaimed with astounded voices, echoing Lorna's words interrogatively—"Gone out to the Crimea as a nurse?"

"Gone out to the Crimea as a nurse?" Reginald A'Bear inquired again, after a pause, for his astonishment had rendered him dumb for the moment—"Whatever can have induced her to take such a step? She never said a word about it in her last letter."

"Ever since you left," answered Lorna Maitland, "she has talked about it; and had been an out-of-door sister, or 'extern' I think they call it, for about a month at a Home in London. She has gone out with a friend, one of the sisters, who had determined upon it some weeks before; but I can't help thinking that something must have happened to make Gerty resolve upon it so hurriedly."

"Did she make no allusion to anything

which may have finally determined her in her letter to you?" he asked.

"No! she just said that she was going, that she had been gradually making up her mind to it, and that she would not visit us before starting, from fear that we might try to dissuade her from her purpose. It was just about the time when your first letter came with the news of Charlie's wound, and as it rather upset me at first, I did not send on the intelligence to her; and when I was getting better, and was just going to write to her, another letter came to say that she had already started."

"Poor little Gerty!" he exclaimed. "I would not have had it happen for anything under the sun. Of course she would expect to see us there on her arrival; and then to find us gone, and not even a letter left behind. Poor little woman! if I had only known it, I certainly should have stayed behind, and sent Charlie home under the charge of Long Bob. I really feel almost inclined to go back to

Plymouth this very night, and start again for Balaclava the first thing in the morning."

"I think you had better wait until one of us has received a letter," observed Mr. Maitland, "or perhaps you may only cross one another on the passage again."

"I suppose it is of no use to cry over spilt milk, according to friend Charlie's favourite motto in former days; but it is certainly most unfortunate. I would not have her think me intentionally unkind for worlds."

This untoward circumstance rather put a damper on their happiness; it was evidently the uppermost thought in Reginald's mind during the rest of the evening, for he could not help constantly alluding to it. Lorna, however, quietly rejoiced over his anxiety and disquietude, for it was a proof that Reginald was not altogether heedless of his cousin's happiness. After they had left, he spent an hour or two in writing a long letter to Gerty, explaining everything; and before breakfast next morning, rode with it to Kingsbridge on

"Tchernaya ;" and while the horse stepped bravely out, apparently rejoicing that he was again in England, his master was not at all sure that he was of the same mind, and was wondering what could have caused his cousin so hastily to take such a decided step.

On comparing notes many months afterwards, Reginald discovered that at one period of his homeward journey they had been much nearer to one another than either of them had suspected at the time, for the ship which was conveying Gertrude Sinclair to the Crimea was the very one which had nearly made an end of "The Peri" and her crew, as they were rounding Cape Matapan the southern point of the Morea. Although Winnifred A'Bear suspected the reason, there was only one person in England who knew the secret and immediate cause of Gerty's resolve, and that person was her cousin Hugh; but he very naturally kept the intelligence to himself.

Hugh A'Bear, as far as talent was concerned, had fulfilled all the promise of his

youth ; and yet, perhaps, his mother was the only person in the world who had any true and heart-felt affection for him. His father was proud of him, but there was but little real love lost between them ; perhaps there was too great a similarity between their characters in many points, although in other respects there was a great difference ; in his heart Hugh sometimes despised his father for what he considered his somewhat low notions of honour, notwithstanding that they might be the recognised principles of those around them. He was studying for the Bar, studying hard, too ; and yet found time to contribute to several of the magazines, which contributions were distinguished for their concentration of thought and purity of style, for their advanced Radicalism, and the power which the author seemed to possess, as he was evidently a young man, of convincing himself of the inherent truth of his recently assumed opinions ; intensely dogmatic, while professing to despise dogma. Men who knew him

prophesied that the highest prizes of his profession were open to him ; if he failed it would be through no fault of trying—ambition was his god, selfishness his master—and to the attainment of the coveted honours before him he bent all the energies of a highly cultivated intellect and a powerful mind. He was a welcome guest, young as he was, at many of the houses of the great and known, making many acquaintances but few friends ; and although looked up to and respected by those with whom he was more immediately thrown into contact, was less liked than feared, as his love of irony and sarcasm had not decreased as he had grown older.

He had always, at least for some years, had a certain predilection for his cousin, Gertrude Sinclair ; indeed, he loved her as deeply as it was possible for a person so entirely wrapped up in self to surrender his heart to any one. Could he have fulfilled the Scripture precept, “to love his neighbour as himself,” he would have loved her dearly indeed ; but that was

an impossibility. He would never for a moment have thought of hampering himself with a poor wife ; but Gertrude had a comfortable independence, entirely in her own power, which would be an assistance rather than a hindrance to him in his ambitious schemes, and so, after arguing the pros and cons of celibacy *versus* matrimony and his cousin Gerty, resolved to propose to her the very next day. This he did in a way that any girl of spirit—and Gertrude Sinclair was by no means deficient in that material—would be sure to resent ; as though he were doing her an honour in making the proposal, and with the preconceived conviction that there could be but one answer to his question : but then Hugh's great want, the want of every selfish man, was a practical knowledge of human nature, a want which often showed itself in his after life.

To his astonishment, he met with a refusal, kind and gentle at first ; but when, assuming or really perhaps believing, that her refusal

was the effect of surprise, and that when she thought over the matter calmly she would doubtless change her mind before many days were over, he was answered in a most peremptory manner with a flash of the eye and a stamp of the foot, he began to see the mistake he had made, to the severe wounding of his vanity.

“The sooner this interview is over the better, Hugh,” she said; “I have told you that I can never feel towards you as a wife should towards her husband, and I am not the least likely to change my mind. If you could be content to receive the amount of affection which I might manage to scrape together in a few days, I should not be content to give it.”

“What do you expect?” he answered, “that I should fall on my knees and swear to be your slave; and tell you a pack of lies as I am told men often do on these occasions? I can offer you as much affection as you are ever likely to receive.”

"I *expect* nothing," she replied, emphasizing the verbs, "I only *hope* that you will treat me like a lady, and will remember that I am your father's ward under the protection of his roof; and, as I have asked to be alone, that you will leave me, or must I be the one to finish this interview and join your sister in the drawing room?"

"Poor foolish girl!" he scornfully sneered, for his self-love was more keenly wounded than he could have thought possible. "You are like therest of yoursex, ever looking for that fancied attribute of humanity to which you have misapplied the name of love. It is just an *ignis-fatuus*, the pursuit of which will lead you into all sorts of disappointment and sorrow, until at length you will discover the false nature of what you have been seeking. All this you may escape by accepting the offer which I have now made—for the last time then, Gerty, will you be my wife?"

Gertrude Sinclair with a great effort, had preserved her temper thus far, but her ire was rising.

“ I never change my mind,” she rejoined, “ and that you might have known by this time. I am very much obliged for your advice, and your opinion of our sex, although you seem to forget that you have a mother and sister. With regard to your notions about love, I would suggest it as a topic for your next essay ; it is a pity that I should be the only person that you should deign to enlighten on the subject. I am not so terribly anxious to be married as you seem to suppose ; and if love be a will-o’-the-wisp, I must remain an old maid to the end of my days, for I will never marry any man unless I love him, and have reason to think that he loves me in return.” As she finished, she moved to the door, remarking, “ but as this interview seems likely to degenerate into a quarrel, the sooner it is terminated the better, and if Mr. Hugh A’Bear will not be so polite as to open the door, I must open it for myself.”

As she moved forward, her cousin Hugh’s anger and wounded pride got the better of

him for a moment, and he said, though he would have given much to have recalled the words before they were hardly out of his mouth, “Ah, I see what it is, you are hoping some day to catch Lorna Maitland’s cast-off lover.”

Gertrude Sinclair’s attitude, as soon as those hasty and ungenerous words fell on her ears, would have made her fortune on the stage, and she never looked more beautiful than at that moment, as drawing herself up proudly, though her heart beat so quickly as to cause her considerable pain, she exclaimed, with flashing eyes, as she passed him on the way towards the door—“Hugh, you are a coward !”

When she reached her own room, however, she locked the door, and throwing herself on the bed burst into a torrent of burning tears. It was indeed a cowardly act, and she felt those cruel words not the less because her heart told her that they were true. One thing was certain, that she could not stay any longer under the same roof with her cousin,

and following a sudden impulse, resolved, without ever thinking of any possible consequences, to follow her friend's example and advice, and to offer herself as a nurse for the Crimean hospitals.

Hugh was not an altogether bad-hearted man, and, except where his selfishness came in the way, generally took a right view of things, and was heartily ashamed of himself for having allowed his temper to get the better of him on this occasion ; he felt that his cousin's accusation was too true, that they were indeed cowardly words. Besides which, how could he ever hope to be a leader of men, if he did not first learn to conquer his own temper. He felt excessively annoyed with himself, in the first place for having ever put himself in such a position, and then, for having acted so unwisely afterwards. At last, as the result of his meditations, after walking about the room for some time, he brought himself, not without a struggle, to write a letter to his cousin ; in which he said that he was sorry for the remark which he had so forgotten.

himself as to give utterance to ; that he intended to leave home for some days ; and that he hoped on his return they might meet again as though nothing had passed between them.”

He was not going to dine at home that evening, and on his way down from dressing, looked into the drawing room, and gave the note to his sister Winnifred, with the remark, “that he and Gerty had had a bit of a quarrel, and that he had made *l'amende honorable* in the letter.” Gerty willingly accepted the apology, for hers was not a nature to bear animosity ; but at the same time resolutely persisted in her determination of going to the Crimea.

Our lives often turn upon some slight event, and some circumstance but little noticed at the time may alter the whole tenor of our existence. Whether their after histories would have been materially different had the letter announcing her determination to Reginald reached its destination, it is of course impossible to assert. One thing, however, resulted from it, the two cousins did not meet for many a long day afterwards.

CHAPTER III.

GERTRUDE SINCLAIR, in determining to go to the Crimea as a nurse, had acted on the impulse of the moment; her first and great desire, in the agony of the time immediately after her interview with her cousin Hugh in his father's dining room, had been to put as large a portion of the world as possible between them. While she felt that Reginald was the only being in the world whom she could ever really love, she had made up her mind, or thought she had, that she would never be anything else to him but his cousin Gerty. As soon as she had brought herself to take this view of the matter, instead of nursing her sorrow, and spending a useless life, a burden to herself and every one about

her, she seriously thought of joining a London sisterhood, and devoting the remainder of her life to the good of her fellow creatures. A winter passed in the Crimean hospitals would be a good novitiate; and a letter offering to accompany her was an agreeable surprise to the sister who had very lately expended all her eloquence in vain to induce her young friend to become a nurse; but, though surprised, she asked no questions.

Other matters besides marriages are often undertaken in haste, and repented of at leisure, and as the vessel was nearing its destination, the young nurse began to ask herself, "whether the resolve had not been acted upon a little too hastily? whether it did not seem to give colour to Hugh's unkind accusation? and whether, after all, the real reason which had made her determine on joining the noble sisterhood at Balaclava, had not been that she would be going to the place where Reginald was?" Truthful and honest as the

day, she mentally accused herself of being a hypocrite, and thought how unworthy she was of being reckoned among that noble band of self-denying women; but prayed and hoped that she might be strengthened to perform the work that she had undertaken. It was therefore with a certain sense of relief, mingled with a much larger measure of intense disappointment, that she found "The Peri" had sailed. No thought of any intentional neglect or unkindness on her cousin's part ever entered her mind, but she at once suspected the truth; either that they had started before her letter had arrived, or that it had never reached its destination. It was another proof, if one had been needed, that previous convictions were only too true, and with a sigh and a thought of regret at what perhaps might have been, Gerty accepted the inevitable, and turned with all her energies to the work before her. Those who had gone before her had borne the burden and heat of the day, but still there was much

to be done ; it was work, too, just suited to her energetic good nature and innate sympathy of character ; and during the rest of the winter, a worthy disciple of " *Sancta Philomela,*" she attended

" The wounded from the battle plain,
In dreary hospitals of pain,"

as she flitted from room to room,

" On cold and stony floors,
Through gloomy corridors,"

ministering to the sick, nursing the convalescent, comforting the dying. Many a rough, hard man, as he looked into her fair, bright face, so calm and gentle, made doubly beautiful by the holy work in which she was engaged, or called down blessings on her head, as he raised her hand in gratitude to his withered lips, or kissed her shadow as it fell upon the wall, might be forgiven for thinking that no angel in Heaven could be better or more beautiful; but Gerty knew that with all her efforts and ceaseless activity, her heart was oftentimes rebellious.



In the middle of January, on the morning of a bright, warm midwinter day in South Devon, with a southerly wind but not a cloudy sky, and but little to remind a body that he was in that month, when—as “the days begin to lengthen, the cold begins to strengthen”—unless, indeed, he turned his head in the direction of Dartmoor, whose Tors were covered with snowy nightcaps, not yet dispelled by the morning sun; or looked at the gaunt and naked arms of the old elm trees by the road side, with their half decayed and wholly withered leaves around them; at the flowerless, fernless hedges, songsterless, except for the note of the robin redbreast; at the fields redolent to the farmer’s nose with the smell of sheep on turnips, and noisy with their coughing; or where the tiny green leaves of autumn-sown wheat gave promise of the future harvest—it was evident that something of importance was taking place in the little village of Sandstone. From the outward signs of joy manifest everywhere; from the

arches with their words of welcome; from the flocking of all the womenkind from the neighbouring hamlets in the direction of the church, a stranger even might have known the cause of the village rejoicing.

Upon the altar of the simple little church, though it was only the month of January, lay a dish of snowdrops and primroses, which the village children had spent days in collecting, having ransacked for the purpose in their labour of love every hedge within the radius of some miles; and much more beautiful and suggestive did they look on the occasion, than the hot-house flowers by which they were surrounded. The bells had been ringing all the morning, but they were hushed for a time, although the ringers had their hands on the ropes ready to commence a yet more joyous peal as soon as the word was given; and never in their lives would they pull with greater pleasure, for their hearts would keep time to the joyous music. And why? The children of their beloved pastor, who had en-

deared himself to them by many an act of kindness, were both pledging their troth, and being joined in hand to those to whom they had been long joined in heart. The double event was coming off, and Reginald A'Bear, who had been ordained at Christmas as additional curate of Sandstone, was performing the ceremony. A college friend of Edric Maitland was his groomsman, and the young doctor, who had been sent home in charge of a shipload of convalescents, was assisting O'Connor in the same capacity; while in double lines behind the brides streamed a bevy of fair maidens. One face, whose absence was, except by one person present, universally lamented, alone was wanting; for Gertrude Sinclair was still in the Crimea.

Edric and Winnifred were first made man and wife, and then came the moment when it would be Reginald's duty to perform the same office for the second couple also. The sun had been gradually travelling on its daily round, and just at that very moment it was

shining brightly through a lancet window in the southern wall of the chancel. As Reginald A'Bear stepped forward to receive Lorna's hand from her father, and to present her to her husband, its rays fell full upon his face ; but his sincerity (*ειλικρίνεια*) might have been tried by the sunlight, and not found wanting. There was a significance in the act on this occasion, which they all three understood, and Lorna's hand trembled slightly as it rested for a second or two in his.

The double ceremony over, the whole party adjourned to Burrscombe, and shortly afterwards in a brace of carriages, each with a pair of greys, the two happy couples re-commenced the journey of life together—Edric and his bride intending, by easy stages, to reach their northern home, where the boys, much to their own delight, and to the intense disgust of their hard-hearted fathers, holiday-distracted mothers, and over-teased sisters, were to assemble a week later than usual ; while Lorna and her husband started by the

express from Totnes direct for London, from whence, after enjoying the gay sights and scenes of the Metropolis for a few weeks, O'Connor, his leave of absence over, was going to take his bride to Woolhurst, where a house on the borders of the common was being prepared for their reception.

Among the many friends and relatives present was Richard Heffernan of Belfast, merchant and manufacturer, who had come over from Ireland expressly for the wedding, and as he had largely increased O'Connor's allowance, was, as may be supposed, a very welcome guest; strongly objecting to matrimony, as far as he himself was personally concerned, he was yet well pleased that his favourite nephew was not intending to follow his example.

"It is my misfortune, not my fault, that I am an old bachelor," was all the answer enquiring nieces could get from him, and with this they had to be content. Many a Belfast lady of mature years and waning charms had

made a dead set at Uncle Dick, desirous of a share in the profits of the linen manufactory of Heffernan and Co., but he was proof against all their arts and blandishments. By degrees they all retreated from the scene, except one in whom the bump of hope must have been very largely developed ; for not a grain of encouragement did she ever receive to support her expectation that the fortress would surrender. At length, she too raised the siege, and being more successful in her next attempt, asked Uncle Heffernan, when he came to congratulate her on the coming event, to walk with her to church, as he was her oldest friend.

“ With the greatest pleasure in life,” he answered, with a chuckle ; but when he had brought her as far as the church door, and performed his promise to the letter, he quietly took off his hat, and wishing her good morning, amid the laughter of the bystanders, left the unfortunate lady to make the rest of the journey as best she could. This was, of

course, very wrong of Uncle Dick, but it had the desired effect ; he has ever since been left alone by designing spinsters and bewitched widows, and is supposed, by the universal consent of the fair sex of Belfast and neighbourhood, to be a confirmed and professed misogynist and misogamist.

On the evening of the wedding-day there was a large party assembled in the large kitchen of Burrscombe. Among the rest, presided over by John Woolcote and his wife, were old Nix, and his two sons Reuben and Harry, Long Bob and his wife Sally, from Plymouth, and Horatio Nanton, commonly called Sambo. The speech of the evening, as may be supposed, was made by Jabez Stear, who sat on the right of Mistress Woolcote. Unfortunately, there was no reporter present on the occasion, so that the speech, interlarded plenteously with quotations from Shakespeare and other poets, cannot be handed down to posterity ; but there have since been very strong suspicions that on this occasion,

Jabez only spoke in the character of a professional advocate, and that his real feelings on the subject were expressed in words muttered philosophically and sardonically to himself as he sat down, drowned by the applause of the assembled company, but heard by the wrathful mistress of the ceremonies—"but, as the wise man saith, the end of a thing is better than the beginning ; it is better to go to a funeral than a wedding."

Nothing could ever be decided on the matter, as to all the old nurse's accusations he deigned to return no answer ; but the suspicions were very much intensified by a circumstance which occurred the next day. Uncle Dick and Jabez were seen in earnest confabulation, and it was generally supposed that the carrier received considerable largess from the eccentric manufacturer on account of the similarity of their views on the blessedness of the single state.

By degrees, things were gradually getting into their ordinary course again, and while the-

two newly-married couples were beginning to feel, as Winny expressed it, "like old married people," and Mr. and Mrs. Maitland were growing more reconciled to the absence of their daughter; while Reginald, liking his work more every day, was settling to the collar, and earnestly striving to become thoroughly conversant with the work of a parish pastor in all its branches; suddenly his plans for the future were altered by a letter, the contents of which perplexed him much while determining upon the right course to pursue.

It was a letter from Mrs. Adams, of Bearcroft, saying that she had heard that he had been ordained, and offering him the living of Bearcroft, which had just become vacant. "I know of no clergyman," she wrote, "to whom to present it; and from what I have heard of your character, have the greatest pleasure in being able to offer it to you. If you can bear the thought of coming back, you may be the means of doing much good here, as your

name is still held in the greatest veneration in this neighbourhood. We are sadly in want of a hard-working, energetic clergyman, who will lead the way in good works."

Before speaking to his grandmother, Reginald determined to show the letter to Mr. Maitland, and ask his advice. As soon as the worthy vicar had read it, he said—

" Well, what have you resolved upon doing?"

" I have made no resolution at all about the matter as yet," he answered, " but have come down to ask your advice, if you will be so kind as to give it me."

" Give it you! that I will with pleasure; I don't see how you can hesitate for a moment; there cannot be two opinions on the point. Much as I shall miss you, I say, go, and may God be with you. I do not think you need be afraid of any envious feelings gaining the mastery over you. If the offer of a pastoral charge had ever the right to be considered as a call, this has."

"That is exactly how I looked at the matter, directly I got over the first feelings of surprise. I have no fear that thoughts of envy will get the better of me, feeling as I do that the giving up of the estates was the noblest deed ever done by any of our race—no, I have no fear of that—but what I do feel is my utter inexperience, and that makes me hesitate; if now, it had been in a year's time, it would have made all the difference."

"Then if you will just take my advice," replied Mr. Maitland, "you will hesitate no longer. As to inexperience, a very short time of practical work, and the responsibility of a parish, will put that to rights. Your heart's in the work, and that's the main thing, after all; and you have far more knowledge on one point, and that of the utmost importance, than most of your brother clergy have when they go down to their graves; I mean, a knowledge of human nature. It is such an opening for good, that you must feel bound to accept it."

As his grandmother, loth at her time of life to lose him as she was, took the same view as Mr. Maitland, Reginald A'Bear wrote the next day to Mrs. Adams and accepted the living of Bearcroft. Although he had been only six months in orders, the Bishop, under the circumstances of the case, agreed to the nomination ; and thus it was that he became possessor for life of the rectory house at Bearcroft, and settled once again in the midst of the scenes of his early childhood.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was, however, with somewhat peculiar feelings that the new rector of Bearcroft, who had brought "Tchernaya" up from South Devon in the same train with himself, drew up for a few minutes on his road, to take possession of the living, at the spot where his father and grandfather had looked their last at Bearcroft. He gazed across the park at the noble pile of buildings of which he had been born the heir; and as "Tchernaya," accustomed to forage in the Crimea, commenced to nibble the delicate leaves of the white clover by the road-side, many and conflicting thoughts stirred within his master's bosom. How long he might have remained thus musing it is impossible to say, had not

the noise of horse's hoofs on the hard road aroused him from the reverie ; so gathering up the reins he trotted on again, and shortly afterwards met a young lady cantering along on a beautiful grey thoroughbred, followed by a groom in smart livery. He noticed, as they quickly passed one another, that she had a good figure, and rode well ; for as her veil was down he could not see her face, but supposed, and rightly, that she was Miss Lucy Adams, the heiress of Bearcroft ; while she, as lifting her eyes for a moment she caught a glimpse of his features, thought it was very like some of the ancient portraits in the old hall, and supposed, and rightly, that he was Mr. Reginald A'Bear, the new rector of Bearcroft. With this news she hastened home, while Reginald, to get rid of some unwelcome thoughts, trotted briskly along by the side of the sunken roadway across the park, over the rustic bridge, under the old archway, leading from one part of the pleasure grounds to the other, and was soon

before the lodge gates, at the further end, leading into the village.

“ A beautiful day,” he said to the old man who came forward to open the gates.

“ Eez,” he answered, as he slowly swung them to, “ Eez, wold Zammel knew thee; when oi zeed thee commen thirt park, thinks oi to myzel, thic be young maister A’Bear. Oi doant knowa whoi oi zhould have thought zo; but zinze uz knowed az thee wazt commen to Rectory, me and the mizzuz beeze mozt allers a-talkin aboot thee; vor di zee yer know zhe waz yer vatherz’ nuz, and oi have been gardiner to th’ old place vor noigh vorty year come Martinmuz; and do-e-now come to zee her zoon, if zo be that thee beezyable ti, vor th’old ooman have took to her bed, and ull be maist glad to zee thee.”

“ I will come and see her to-morrow, after evening church, and you may tell her that I won’t disappoint her. So you remember me. I cannot say that I remember you, though, but suppose you must be John Woolcote’s

uncle, the Samuel Woolcote of whom I often remember to have heard my grandfather speak."

"Eez, oi be wold Zammel Oolcot. Zo th' old maizter told thee of Zammel. Oi vollerded un to the grave, and zeed un buried, and he waz allerz a good maizter to oi. Th' A'Bears' were allerz good maizters, ther'll never be the loike again. Not but that the new volks be good maizters too, they be wonderful koind to th'old ooman. Miss Loozy, zhe do often come and zit-wi-er, and they mozt toimz getz to talk about th' zame subjec, th'old volks."

As the gate was now wide open, and it was evident that "Wold Zammel," who had arrived at that time of life when the tongue once started is not readily stopped again, would have gone on talking for an hour or two, the new Rector touched "Tchernaya" with his heel, and as he left the worthy old man, said—

"Mind you tell your wife that I will come

and see her to-morrow, and you can say at the same time that you were the first person to welcome me to Bearcroft."

Indeed, the words of the garrulous old man had gone to his heart, and he left the park with much lighter spirits than he had entered it.

In the evening, as the sun was setting, he walked to the churchyard, to visit his parents' graves. If he had not remembered in what part of the ground they were situated, he would have had no difficulty in finding them; indeed, so many were in the habit of visiting them, and hearing their history from the sexton, "Wold Zammel's" brother, that there was quite a zig-zag pathway leading to them, between the graves. As he picked his way among them, a pair of robins—descendants, perhaps, of the one he used to listen to when a child—flew from under the coping stone of an old brick grave, where they had been feeding their young. The sight of them conjured up many thoughts

as he walked on towards the marble crosses, which now came in view round a corner of the church.

When he drew nearer, what was his astonishment to find that wreaths of lovely flowers and evergreens were hanging round each of them, and this sign of thoughtful sympathy touched deeply all the fresh springs of his heart. They could only have come from one place; indeed they had been made that same afternoon by Mrs. Adams and her daughter, and had been in their present position but a few minutes, having been placed there by wold Zammel and his brother, the sexton. It was a proof that the ladies of Bearcroft had gentle, loving hearts, and from his inmost soul he thanked them for their thoughtful and Christian welcome, which spoke far more eloquently than any words could possibly have done. When on his return he found a letter awaiting him from Bearcroft, the stereotyped forms of expression which he used in answering it meant far more than they usually do;

for it was indeed "with great pleasure" that he accepted the "kind invitation to dinner" on the following Monday evening.

The next day, which happened to be the first Sunday after Trinity, saw the little church of Bearcroft crowded from end to end with an attentive congregation; many attracted by curiosity, but some to hear the words of life from the grandson of their old squire. His morning text was taken from the Epistle for the day, and the subject of the discourse was "Love," and was a declaration of the spirit in which he came to minister to them; the evening text was Solomon's Song, iv., 16, "Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out," and the subject was "The Uses of Prosperity and Adversity." It made a great impression on all present. He concluded something in this way—

"It is a blessed thing to see one whom prosperity has not spoiled, upon whom the blowing of the south wind has had no other

effect than to cause the spices to flow out ; about whose presence there seems to dwell a nameless charm, which, like the course of the gentle zephyr, seems to brighten up everything with which it comes in contact. But surely it is an equally, nay, a far more blessed sight to see one whom adversity has not soured ; whose heart the blowing of the north wind has not frozen ; who comes forth from every trial, stronger, purer, holier, fitter for Paradise, more meet for Heaven.

“ Do not doubt God’s love, however hard may be the trials you may have to endure. Never fear that He will try you above what you are able to bear, that He will send you the affliction without the needful strength. How many a one in the history of his own life has not proved this ; has not out of weakness been made strong ; has not found that the *Good Shepherd* ‘ tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.’ ”

“ Well, Mrs. Adams, what do you think of my advice now ? ” said a little brisk fresh-

looking old gentleman, rubbing his hands together, though it was in the height of summer ; not with the smooth and noiseless manner of the late senior partner of the firm of Pluckem and Saveall, but with a brisk and lively motion, according to the method of boys at school when they wish to produce the smell of gunpowder ; and then, walking forward with a sharp, quick step for a few paces, which was another part of the operation, he waited till his companions came up, and repeated the question, “ Well, Mrs. Adams, what do you think of my advice now that you have listened morning and evening to the young rector ? I don’t think that I ever heard in my life any sermons that I liked better ; I think, though, that we must get him up to Manchester ; never do to leave him to rust at Bearcroft.” And off the little man started again, rubbing his hands as if with the full determination of there and then getting rid of the outer dermatine covering of their palms, and smiling as though very

much pleased either with himself, or with the world in general, or with the fact in particular that he had had the principal share in the appointment of Reginald A'Bear to the living of Bearcroft.

As soon as they had caught him up, Mrs. Adams replied—

“I have only to thank you once again for most excellent advice. I never ought to have hesitated for a moment, when you have advised me before so often and so well. I should have known that the advice would be equally judicious on this occasion also. But we are not going to have you inviting him to Manchester; if Mr. A'Bear will only work as well as he preaches, he will find plenty to do in this neighbourhood.”

“And what does my little friend Lux say on the matter?” asked the old man somewhat abruptly, addressing Miss Lucy Adams, who was on the other side of her mother, by the pet name which he had given to her many years before.

“ Oh ! I thought this evening’s sermon the most beautiful I ever heard ; it seemed just like a beautiful piece of music, which, when I have heard for the first time, always rings in my head for days afterwards.”

“ Well, and what did the tune say ?”

“ Oh, a great many things ; I was just thinking, when you spoke, that I was just one of those persons who had never experienced anything except prosperity, upon whom the south wind only had blown ; and I was thinking—”

“ Well, Lux, I am delighted to find that a young lady of your age does think sometimes ; and what conclusion did you come to ?”

“ I was thinking that a little of the north wind might be a good thing for me ; or else, you see, perhaps the spices may never flow at all.”

“ The wind bloweth where it listeth,” interrupted her mother ; “ it is God’s will that the south wind only has blown upon you as yet ; and when it is His will, the north wind

will come. Prosperity and adversity are both of His sending, and, as you heard to-night, they both have their uses."

"Tell me something else, Lux," said the old gentleman, who seemed determined, for some reason, to sound the depths of his young friend's mind; "is that all the tune says?"

"Oh, no; it says many other things. I was thinking that Mr. A'Bear must have been drawing from his own experience when he wrote the sermon: for the north wind must have begun to blow upon him when he was quite a little boy, and I don't think that any one could have written such a sermon unless he was speaking from his own knowledge. He must have great command over himself to be able to come back again here, when he knows that once upon a time it all belonged to him."

Her questioner did not answer, except by rubbing his hands very hard together, and walking very briskly forward for a few paces, which brought him to a spot where a path

branched off across the park. Here he stopped, and when they came up, said that he would go for a little longer walk, and join them at supper time; and off he started through the wicket, springing along, rubbing his hands, stopping for a moment, and then at it again, harder than ever, until he was out of sight.

“Whatever is the matter with Mr. Gruggen this evening?” inquired Lucy of her mother, as soon as he was well out of hearing; “he seems quite excited about something. I never remember him rubbing his hands in such a desperate manner before. When I was a little girl I used to wonder that they did not wear out; but really if he goes on this way he will rub away as much in a week as will serve an ordinary mortal for a year.”

“When I first knew him, about a year before your grandfather died, I remember he told me that he began life as a clerk in a lawyer’s office where there was no fire; and in the winter he was obliged to walk up and

down the office rubbing his hands together to keep himself warm, and so contracted the habit, which has never left him. With all his peculiarities, he is a good man, and he is evidently very much pleased that his advice has turned out so well."

As soon as Lucy had taken off her things, she went into her mother's room, and after looking out of the window for a minute or two, remarked, "Do you know, mamma, I can't help thinking that Mr. A'Bear must have had some great trouble or other, something more than the loss of his property; for you know in his letter to you he said he did not regret that for a moment, and would not wish his grandfather to have acted in any other way on any account."

"Why, Lucy, what makes you think so?"

"His face looks like it, and it seemed to me as if he spoke in a sort of tone as though he were talking, not of what he had read about, or been told, but of what he really knew"—all this being said with her face still looking

in the direction of the church spire, which appeared above the trees at the further end of the avenue—"I seem to remember what he said in one passage quite well, almost the very words, 'Our whole life, perchance, may be a toiling up the hill, carrying a heavy burden, wearing our crown of thorns; yet, though we never feel aught but the blowing of the north wind, though the back be bowed down, though the brow be weary and painstricken, and our limbs feeble and distressed; yet, let us bravely and patiently journey on, knowing that when we reach the summit we shall understand at last that He who has ordered our lot on earth has done all things well.' When he came to that passage I am sure that his voice faltered a little, and that he was thinking about something or other in his own life."

" You are generally quicker in seeing things than I am," her mother answered, as she prepared to leave the room, " and perhaps you may be right, and at any rate we can try our best to temper the wind to the shorn lamb."

Lucy Adams, now a young lady of eighteen, was very different to what she had been when Reginald A'Bear had met her after his grandfather's funeral ; and if he had remembered his opinion of her, as expressed to his grandmother, would have been heartily ashamed of it, " Oh ! I didn't take much notice of her, she was just an ugly black thing, and always ran away and hid herself when she saw me, so I don't think she's got too much sense."

The county families had somewhat resented the coming of the old merchant into their select part of the county, and during his lifetime but little intercourse had taken place between the inhabitants of Bearcroft and the neighbouring squirearchy and aristocracy, but of late years many more carriages had driven through the gates on their way to the old house ; for was not little Lucy heiress of many broad acres, and goodness knows how many hundreds of thousands of pounds in consols ; and was she not growing older every

day? Mrs. Adams returned their calls, but still she and her child lived a most secluded life; so that when Lucy reached her nineteenth year she knew far less of the world and its ways than most young ladies many years younger.

Mrs. Adams had superintended her child's education, but during the winter season, so as not to lose any of the lovely summer time, they had usually spent some months in London, so that Lucy had been instructed by some of the best masters in the metropolis, and was an accomplished linguist and musician. She was to have come out at a grand ball to be given at Bearcroft on her eighteenth birthday, but when the time drew near had begged so hard to be let off for one more year, that Mrs. Adams at last consented, glad enough at heart that she was to have her darling Lucy all to herself for one more year. Mr. Gruggen—it was just about the time that the living had been offered to Reginald—was her great ally on the occasion, and between them they had carried the day.

As she walked on the terrace just outside the library, waiting for the coming of her old friend, any person accustomed to judge of character from appearance would have remarked that she was not pretty and yet not plain, with a pleasant smile, dark brown hair, and soft but speaking eyes of the same colour ; and would have thought, and rightly, that she was a sweet and gentle, unaffected girl, who must be seen at home to be appreciated ; not one of our rose-buds but of our apple blossoms, who have a modest beauty of their own and give promise of still greater excellence in the future, and in Autumn when we look for apples will not disappoint us with haws ; who could talk in an unassuming way of something better than scandal and nonsense, and answer in words somewhat longer than monosyllables. Her chief companions had been her books and her music, and as Mr. Gruggen knew, for he was fond of drawing her out, was accustomed to think far more than most young ladies of her age. She was

of a somewhat romantic turn of mind—as what young lady of eighteen is not?—which had been very much fostered by the associations connected with Bearcroft; and as she walked on the terrace and looked at the spire across the park, her thoughts were running in much about the same groove as when she had been gazing out of the window in her mother's room a few minutes before. “Here am I,” she was saying to herself, “in the place which ought to be his, and he so much more worthy of it than I am;” and it seemed to her very much like Ivanhoe the disinherited knight coming back to the home of his fathers, and finding another in possession.

Dinner parties were rare events now-a-days at Bearcroft, and although the new rector was going to be the only guest, Miss Lucy Adams took as much trouble with her toilette as though there had been a dozen guests expected; and, as she tripped down the stairs with a red rosebud just opening in her

hair, looked almost pretty. Mr. Gruggen, who was the only person in the drawing room when she entered, thought that his little friend Lux was not almost, but altogether so, as she stood smiling at him from the opposite side of the rug, while she submitted good humouredly to his inspection.

"When you have quite finished your silent criticism, you may give me your opinion on my new dress," she said.

"It is all very pretty and neat," he replied; "but what's the meaning of the rose, Lux? eh? Here have I been nearly a fortnight at Bearcroft, and you have never honoured me by putting a flower in your hair."

"I never knew that you were so fond of flowers before," she retorted. "I don't remember ever seeing you pick one all the years I have known you. I don't know that there is any particular meaning in it; but if you want to know whose idea it was, it was just my own. I wanted something for my hair, and Emma was going to make me a wreath

of I don't know what all ; but I just went down and picked the rose myself, and when she had put it in its place, she had to confess that my taste was better than hers for once."

Mrs. Adams then entered the room, and almost immediately afterwards Mr. A'Bear was announced, and soon the little party were seated round the dining table. Reginald A'Bear did most of the talking, as Mr. Gruggen, who seemed determined to draw him out, kept plying him with questions with regard to his Continental travels and Crimean reminiscences ; and as he had an observant eye and good memory, and the power of graphically describing what he remembered, they were much interested ; if Lucy said little, she was not the least attentive listener of the three. When they knew that his horse was called "Tchernaya," and had survived the Balaclava charge, nothing would satisfy the old gentleman, who seemed suddenly to have taken a great interest in horseflesh, but the

promise to have it brought up for his inspection on the following day.

When they had returned to the drawing room, Mr. Gruggen, having found that the new Rector of Bearcroft was very fond of music, asked Lucy to play one of her favourite pieces. Reginald A'Bear, who was a good musician himself, was astonished to find that the heiress of Bearcroft was such an accomplished performer. He had got the notion into his head somehow or other, originating, perhaps, in his youthful reminiscences, that Miss Lucy Adams was a very ordinary individual, indeed. A person who can do one thing really well, is far less common than is usually supposed, and so in one moment he was undeceived ; for her playing, young as she was, was far more like that of a professional artiste than that of an ordinary drawing room performer. It was a simple piece, which she had chosen at her mother's suggestion, one of Mendelssohn's "songs without words," but so exquisitely rendered, that

before it came to an end, he found himself irresistibly attracted to the piano. When it was finished, she played another piece at his request—an overture of Schuman's, which he picked out of a pile on the table near ; and then, as he had confessed to powers in the same direction, they exchanged places, and he played while she turned over the leaves. Songs followed in their course ; solos to begin with, and then some favourite old duets, until the old lawyer, who was rubbing his hands with delight in the background, and walking about the room in a state of apparently ecstatic pleasure and exultation, which, if Reginald could have witnessed might have made him fear that the old gentleman was liable to sudden attacks of temporary insanity, declared “ that it was as good as any concert he had ever attended in his life, and better than most, for the matter of that ! ” His experience in such matters, however, had been of the most limited description. As soon as the tea things came in, the music

necessarily ceased, as Lucy had to preside at the tea table ; but the music had unlocked the maiden's lips, and Reginald A'Bear could hardly believe that the young lady now pouring out the tea, with her eyes sparkling, and face lit up with enthusiasm, as she discussed with him the merits of their favourite composers, was the same shy girl whom an hour or so before had blushed when he had been introduced to her, and had sat demurely opposite to him, hardly opening her mouth during the whole of dinner. His surprise was not lessened when he found that she was an excellent linguist also, who understood and remembered what she read, and could quote from memory some of his favourite passages of Schiller's "William Tell," and "Maid of Orleans."

Nothing more quickly fascinates a man who has some gifts of intellect himself, than to meet an enthusiastic intellectual woman, especially if she has youth and some personal charms as well ; a fine eye is perhaps the only

feature absolutely necessary in such a case, and Reginald A'Bear noticed that the heiress of Bearcroft possessed it as he was talking to her. She must have an intelligent knowledge of what she is talking about, something more, for instance, than the bare facts as laid down in Magnall's questions, and yet not seem to be aware of its extent ; her apparent object, with a certain diffidence, as of one just commencing to climb the hill of knowledge being to seek for further instruction from one whom she seems to allow is able to impart it. Perhaps she may really know more than the man to whom she is talking, but though she may occasionally suggest a fact or a theory, it flatters him to suppose that he is imparting information.

Now Lucy knew nothing of the art and science of fascination, and had no such thought in her mind at all ; but many a person who make it the study of their lives, might have taken a lesson from her unaffected earnestness as she stated what she knew, and asked

for further information, which, as it happened, Reginald A'Bear, owing to the nature of his studies previous to going to Oxford, was generally able to give her.

As the guest of the evening walked slowly home down the old avenue, where he had hastened years before, after the interview with his grandfather about the sale of Bearcroft, to visit his mother's grave, he determined never to form opinions of persons beforehand, and not to trust again to first impressions, seeing that they could be so completely changed in the course of a single evening. Lorna, Gerty and Winnifred had all been thoroughly well-educated; but Lucy Adams, though only in her nineteenth year, evidently possessed a most highly cultivated intellect, the effect of natural aptitude for acquiring knowledge, which had been fostered by her mother's careful training and her own perseverance, and further educated by her London studies; and her unaffected grace and unassuming manners had made a most favourable impres-

sion on the young rector, as they did upon all those who knew her. It had certainly been a very pleasant evening, and Reginald A'Bear, as he walked home, felt lighter-hearted than for many a long day before. He stopped for a moment in the middle of the avenue to listen to the solitary note of the last nightingale of spring in the neighbouring shrubbery, and found himself humming the air of one of the duets when he arrived at the door of the rectory.

And no less favourable had been the impression made by the young rector upon those with whom he had passed the evening; and with the ladies, first impressions are everything. When Mr. Gruggen reached his own apartment, and had deposited the candle in safety on the table, it was some minutes before he could begin quietly to undress, and being alone, could indulge his peculiar propensity to his heart's content. Up and down the room he walked, rubbing his hands, now quicker, now slower; stopping before

the glass occasionally to adjust his cravat, although just on the point of taking it off; chuckling to himself the while, making much about the same noise as a squirrel playing about among the branches of its sylvan home, although, indeed, his antics resembled more the performances of the same animal when imprisoned in a twirligig cage. When he had worked off in some degree the excess of steam, he commenced to undress, which gave employment to his hands, but in no wise to his mouth, which still continued to chuckle; and he chuckled himself into bed, chuckled himself to sleep, and chuckled somniatively at intervals during the night. Evidently the honest lawyer, as he was called at Manchester, was very much pleased indeed about something or other.

Mrs. Adams was knitting a pair of socks for a little child in the village, and after Mr. Gruggen's departure still continued her work, as she had nearly come to the last row, while

Lucy closed the piano, and arranged the disordered music.

“I am glad you have found somebody at last who can enter into your enthusiasm,” remarked the mother, as her daughter, having finished the work of tidying, over which she lingered rather longer than usual; came to give her a kiss before retiring to her room.

“You don’t think I talked too much, do you? but I was so interested that I could have gone on talking and listening all night. Mr. A’Bear seems quite different to the people about here; don’t you think he is very clever? I am sure that Mr. Gruggen thought so, too.”

“He certainly has been much about in the world,” she answered, while folding her work, “and is very entertaining and agreeable; and seems to understand the art of unlocking the lips of silent ladies. It was something so new to you to find any one who could enter into your favourite pursuits, and discuss them so intelligently, that I don’t wonder you

were carried away a little by your enthusiasm."

As Lucy left the room, and walked through the old hall, she stopped for a moment before the portrait of John Evelyn's friend, a former Reginald A'Bear, and thought how very much like he must have been, with the exception of the dress, to his disinherited descendant; the same hair, nose, and forehead. There was just one thing different, the portrait lacked the smile and expression of the face into which she had looked so often that evening; it was more like the face which she had remarked in the pulpit on the previous Sunday, as the preacher spoke of the uses of adversity. One thing was quite certain, that it was one of the happiest evenings that she had ever spent in her short life; and as she took the red rose-bud out of her hair, and put it into a glass of water, found herself humming a stave of the same duet which seemed also to have impressed itself on the mind of the young rector.

CHAPTER V.

THE beautiful chestnut who long before, under the careful grooming of John Woolcot, had quite recovered from the hard usage which he had undergone in the Crimea—the only memorial of the campaign being a long scar, a proof that he was no impostor, apparently the effect of a sabre cut from a Russian dragoon—was brought up to Bearcroft by his master on the following morning for inspection; which by his prancing and curvetting he seemed thoroughly to enjoy and appreciate, especially the lumps of white sugar which he received from the hands of Lucy Adams. As she stroked him, and bestowed upon him the various forms of endearment which she was accustomed to give to her

own beautiful grey, and kissed his warm, soft nose, Mr. Gruggen remarked—

“It is a fortunate thing for you, Lux, that ‘Prince’ is not a spectator of the scene, or else he would think you a most fickle mistress, and would show his jealousy by kicking you off at the first opportunity.”

“I am sure,” she retorted, “that he would do no such thing ; he has not the least jealousy in his disposition”—“Like his mistress,” (Mr. G. loq.)—“Yes, like his mistress ; and is much too well trained to try and kick me off. Of course he has not a history like ‘Tchernaya,’ ” and she gently stroked the scar which showed plainly on his glossy quarters ; “who could help loving him, when he has been through so many dangers, and has come home in safety ? But he is not like my beautiful grey. Would you like to see him, Mr. A’Bear ? and I think you will say that he is more beautiful even than ‘Tchernaya.’ ”

“That I would very much,” he replied,

"and am quite prepared to endorse your judgment. I am very fond of 'Tchernaya,' as you may suppose, who is as good as he looks, and if less beautiful than 'Prince,' is more fitted, I expect, to go through a hard day's work. I never should have been at the trouble and expense of bringing him all the way from the Crimea, if he had not been Gerard Lisle's favourite charger; but I could not bear the thought of leaving him behind to be harnessed most likely to some lumbering commissariat cart, and after straining himself to death, to die in agony at last, drowned in Balaclava mud. No, my boy," he said, fondly patting him, "you shall have a warm stable to lie in, and a feed of oats as long as ever you are able to eat them."

"Tchernaya," knew that his master was speaking to him, and neighed his thanks, and was answered from the stable yard by "Prince," who had just been brought out of his loose box, and the interesting equine conversation

continued for some time, as they exchanged the compliments of the season.

“What can John be doing, what a time he is?” exclaimed the impatient young lady. The reason of the delay was apparent a few minutes later, when John appeared leading “Prince,” saddled and bridled, ready for a ride. “Poor ‘Prince!’” said his mistress, as she fondled and caressed him, while he pushed his nose into her hand in search of the lump of sugar which was not there; “how disappointed you will be. Poor fellow! he thinks he is going out for a ride, and will have to be taken back to his stable again.”

“That will never do,” interrupted Mr. Gruggen, coming to the rescue; “we must not disappoint ‘Prince.’ Your mother and I can transact our business just as well in the afternoon. So run away and put on your habit; and I daresay Mr. A’Bear will hold the horses while John puts a saddle on the old cob for me.”

Lucy looked at her mother’s face, and

seeing "Yes," written there, was up the steps at a bound (for high-heeled boots had not arrived at their present altitude, and though crinolines were in vogue, the Grecian bend was still in the future), and hastened to put on her hat and habit; and the trio were soon trotting across the park in the direction of the downs, which had once been washed by the waves of the Bristol Channel, when the broad expanse of fen-land which it overlooked had been an arm of the sea. This indeed must have been more or less the case in King Alfred's time, when Athelney would appear to have been an island not in name merely, but in reality.

There was a fresh breeze upon the hills, and the younger horses were evidently as ill-content as their riders with the slow paces of Mr. Gruggen's hack; and by the old gentleman's advice, leaving him to come on at his leisure, they cantered across the down, and the canter turned into a gallop, in which the grey, with the lighter weight on his back,

especially in the ascent at the finish, proved himself to be swifter than the chestnut. The young lady came in the winner, and had time before Reginald A'Bear came up, to put into its place again a lock which had been displaced during the gallop ; she greeted him with a flashing eye and merry laugh, for the excitement of the race had driven away all her shyness, and asked whether ‘Prince,’ after all, was not the better horse of the two.

“ With you on his back, most certainly,” he answered, “ but if we were to change places I think ‘Tchernaya’ would come in a winner by almost as many lengths ; and they continued chatting together until Mr. Gruggen, who came on very leisurely indeed, had caught them up ; when they continued their ride with the intention of visiting “ The A'Bear monument,” that had been erected to the memory of Reginald’s grandfather, “ th’ old squoire,” as he was still affectionately called by th’old volk of the neighbourhood. It was a lovely spot ; in the immediate fore-

ground a belt of woods and plantations, from whence the hill-side sloped precipitately with a steep and rugged descent strewed with rough boulders to the level of the plain below, which stretched away for many miles towards the west, in the direction of the sea. They stayed there for a few minutes ; and as Reginald A'Bear, standing below the record of his beloved grandfather's probity and honour, gazed across the broad expanse of plain below, many a rich acre of which had once belonged to his ancestors, and then looked at the bright and animated girl by his side, whose face for the moment was tinged with sadness, as she divined what might be the nature of his thoughts, he felt that she was not unworthy of being their owner. As they rode home, and turned to have one more look at the view, he remarked—

“ In my travels I have seen very much grander scenery than this ; but after all this is well worth a ride. Very grand scenery I often found to weary and oppress me by its

very grandeur ; whereas, such a view as this has a soothing and softening effect."

"I am so glad to hear you say so," she replied ; "I never will allow any one to run down our beautiful Somersetshire scenery ; I know that there must be a great deal that is much more lovely, but I could never love any half as much."

Reginald's remark originated a discussion between him and Mr. Gruggen on the different parts of Europe he had visited, and the effect of differences of climate and scenery upon those who are brought within their influence ; Lucy, as on the previous evening during dinner, occupying the position of listener, and quite content to be still ; as she told her mother, when the ride was all too quickly finished—

"Mr. A'Bear makes everything so clear and easy, that it is quite a pleasure to listen."

As may be supposed, this auspicious commencement of the intercourse between the rectory and the manor-house, soon developed

into feelings of mutual esteem and regard, and before the end of a year there was seldom a week that did not see the young rector wending his way up the old avenue on the road to Bearcroft about the dinner hour ; and if that was the first it was by no means the only time that “Prince” and “Tchernaya” stood side by side, as their riders admired the scenery from the hill-side upon which Colonel A’Bear’s monument had been erected ; nor was “Friendship” the only duet which Reginald A’Bear and Lucy Adams had sung together.

The county families welcomed back the heir of the A’Bear’s into their neighbourhood, although he was heir to little in comparison to what had been the case when the whole country side had made merry at his birth ; and for the first few weeks the table in the rectory hall was covered with cards, and invitations poured in upon him from every side. But by degrees—for where there are few eligible young men in the neighbourhood, their goings out and comings in are pretty well

known and discussed—the young ladies and the old ones began to lay their heads together and discussed matrimonial probabilities and possibilities.

“Quite romantic, would it not be? but far more extraordinary things have taken place, if one only knew of them,” observed the younger of two ladies to a very dear old gossip, upon whom she was making a morning call.

“Yes, my dear,” replied the lady spoken to, in a stage whisper, for there were several grandchildren in the room, and the little pitchers were making very long ears indeed in the direction of the speaker; “I have often met them riding together. ’Tis true there is usually a groom a long way behind; but at such a distance, my dear, that it never struck me until I had met them several times that he belonged to them. I daresay he understands his business, and does not see more than he need; and my maid” (here the little pitchers made very long ears, longer even

than before, and the ladies' heads drew nearer to one another), "who has a sister at Bearcroft, says that he dines there every week, and often twice; indeed she believes that they see one another nearly every day."

"Really now, you don't say so. Directly I heard that he was coming to the rectory, I said to George, that it must come about; nothing else could be expected."

"Well, my dear, it would be a great thing to have old times back again, for Bearcroft has been as good as shut up for the last twenty years. You don't remember the old colonel's days, my dear, but it was worth living in the neighbourhood then, such hospitality, my dear; so genial, a kind word for every one; so *distingué*, such a figure of a man, too. We all felt his death, I can assure you, my dear, though he had left the neighbourhood for some years, just as if it had been one of our own relatives. When I saw the two turning in at the gate, to ride up to the A'Bear monument—it was only

yesterday, my dear—and they both gave me a pleasant nod, I said to myself, ‘God bless you, my dears, and I think you might both do worse.’ For he is wonderfully like the colonel, my dear; but I was forgetting that you don’t remember those days; and Lucy Adams has wonderfully improved of late, quite a genius, I am told—and no groom did I meet until we got to the cross roads.”

“ You don’t say so,” replied the younger lady, who had come for the express purpose of angling for intelligence; “ really it is most interesting, should it come off it will make quite a stir. In this quiet neighbourhood, we have so little to keep us alive, that it will make quite a commotion. I think I know one or two people, who will be rather disappointed, so George says”— The little pitchers again elongated their ears in the direction of the friendly gossips, but were disappointed, the concluding sentences being spoken in a very low voice.

“ I had heard something of that before;

but I don't believe a word of it, my dear, as Miss Adams has always been brought up in such strict seclusion."

Very shortly afterwards, the younger of the two ladies took her leave, having accomplished the object of her visit ; and this conversation is an example of many which took place with various permutations and combinations, about this time in the neighbourhood of Bearcroft. As the footman stood at the door to receive the next order, the lady came to the determination of calling that same afternoon on Mrs. Adams, and seeing whether she could not discern some signs of the times, in the manners, sayings, or blushings of the young lady. What was her surprise and disappointment, to find that Lucy and her mother had started on the previous day for London, to pass some time, as usual, during the winter months.

"Just like you, always jumping at conclusions," was George's comment that evening, on his wife's communications.

And did Mrs. Adams, all the while, see nothing of what her neighbours were speculating about? While every one else recognized the fact that the heiress of Bearcroft was a young woman, to her mother, whom she was accustomed to consult about every little matter, Lucy at eighteen seemed still more or less of a child; and, so for some time she gave no thought to what might be the consequences of the constantly increasing friendship and intercourse between Reginald A'Bear and her daughter. But by degrees many little things began to open the mother's eyes, for it was evident that a great change had come over Lucy in a short time; she was no longer the shy and diffident girl, content to act the part of listener on all occasions, but began to have opinions of her own, drawn, however, usually from the same source. Though always happy and light-hearted, she had been somewhat quiet and demure; but now she was bright and sparkling, and the house resounded with snatches

of songs from morning to night. Very fond of flowers, on account of their natural beauty, she had never taken any very great interest in the arrangement of the beds, or the decoration of the table ; but now, as Reginald A'Bear understood their culture, she must needs know something of the science of horticulture, and plagued the old gardener accordingly, and when the young Rector was coming to dine, generally arranged the flowers herself. She suddenly came to the conclusion also that solitary rides with the groom behind were very poor pleasures indeed, and "Prince," could he have spoken, would have greatly complained of being so much more frequently taken out for exercise than formerly. Her musical and linguistic studies were followed not quite so methodically ; those pieces being most frequently practised and played which the young rector liked, and before a new piece was commenced Mr. A'Bear's advice had to be asked, and if it was unfavourable, it disappeared from

sight and sound accordingly ; the same with books. A loving and watchful mother, with only one child to observe, could not but detect these outward signs, nor help asking herself what they betokened.

One morning, shortly before their departure for London, Lucy, habited for a ride, was standing in the library, eagerly looking up the avenue in the direction of the old church spire ; when suddenly her eyes sparkled, and a smile of joy lit up her countenance, and her mother needed not to hear her say, "Here he is," to know that Reginald A'Bear was riding up the avenue. Lucy followed him with her eyes, until he was hid by the shrubbery in the vicinity of the house, and then with a face radiant with happiness, went and gave her mother a kiss before starting.

As soon as they had gone, and the sound of the horses' hoofs had died away, Mrs. Adams returned slowly to the library, and began to ask herself what was to be done ;

for it was evident to her that Lucy was in a fair way of losing her heart to the young rector, if indeed the mischief had not been already done. She began to think that it was the only thing which she ought to have expected from the very first, especially with her daughter's romantic notions about everything connected with Bearcroft, and the intimate way in which Reginald A'Bear had been admitted into the house from the very first; that she ought to have been more careful, seeing that he was the only young man that Lucy had ever really known, and was all the more likely to fall in love with on that account. 'Tis true that she knew nothing but what was good about him, but somehow did not feel satisfied, and yet she could not deny that Bearcroft seemed quite a different place since he had come to the rectory, and she enjoyed his visits almost as much as her daughter. It was of no use to make any change now, for if she did, it would most likely only bring matters to a crisis at

once; and as they would be leaving for London at the end of the month, there would be time to make fresh arrangements before they came back again.

Such were the nature of her thoughts, and yet she did not see how she could have acted any differently; and then Mr. Gruggen, who seemed to be the cause of the whole business, came into her mind, and she determined, directly they arrived in London, to write and ask his advice. That same evening the young rector dined at the manor-house, but there were no evident signs that the feelings mutually entertained by the young people for one another, were anything stronger than friendship and esteem. With similar tastes, it was evidently a pleasure to them to be together, as they chatted and sung, and Mrs. Adams almost forgot her morning's meditation, as she listened to her daughter's happy merry voice.

A few days afterwards Mr. Gruggen

received the following letter from the lady of Bearcroft.

“DEAR M^E. GRUGGEN,—

“As you may see by the direction, Lucy and I are once again in our town quarters for the winter, where she intends to make up for lost time, as she has been rather idle lately. It is about what I surmise to be *the cause* of this idleness that I have written to you; and should feel very much obliged if you could give me some advice about a somewhat difficult matter. As I consider it is entirely *your* fault that I have to ask for it, you will feel all the more bound to send it.

“Lucy, I know, has told you in some of her letters of the *intimate friendship* which has sprung up between Mr. A’Bear and ourselves. I have nothing to say against him; he is doing his duty thoroughly to the poor, who bless the day of his appearing among them; and is, as you know, a most agreeable, intelligent, and (for what I know to the contrary)

honourable man. Perhaps, when he came amongst us, I still considered Lucy too much of a child, or I should have been more cautious in admitting him into the house on such a familiar footing ; for I am very much afraid that Lucy begins to look upon him as *something more than a friend*.

" This is what I want you to advise me about. Nothing has passed between them, I know, that Lucy has not told me ; and I do not fancy that she herself realizes *the nature of her feelings* towards him, although they are evident enough to me. If I should say anything to her, or put any hindrance in the way of their meeting on our return to Bearcroft, I might very likely do *more harm than good*. Perhaps my fears are groundless, but I am so afraid of Lucy being entrapped by some *fortune-hunter*, that I cannot prevent suspicions arising in my mind (very likely you will say that I ought to be ashamed of them) that Mr. A'Bear may, after all, be only seeking to gain my dear girl's

affections for the sake of getting back the property of his fathers, without having any *real* affection for her. Think the matter over, dear Mr. Gruggen, and your advice, as always, will I know be most *kind and judicious*.

“Yours very gratefully and sincerely,
“CATHERINE ADAMS.”

“P.S.—I do not mean for a moment *to accuse* Mr. A’Bear of acting in any way *dishonourably*; indeed we seem to have sought his friendship rather than he to have sought ours. I only wish to act for the best, and for my dear and only child’s happiness. C. A.”

When the letter arrived Mr. Gruggen was at his office, where any amount of marching and countermarching excited no surprise, his peculiarities being well known. However, as he was in one room, while his clerks were in another, where, remembering the frigid temperature in which he had passed his apprenticeship, he had taken care to see that a fireplace was one

of the fixtures—he on this occasion out-Gruggened Gruggen, as he walked up and down the room in which there was but little space for the operation, looking up every now and then at some japanned boxes on which were written “Mr. Matthew Adams.” At last he settled down to business, having determined to put off answering Mrs. Adams’ letter until the evening, when surrounded by the Lares and Penates of his home he could more easily sink the lawyer in the friend. Still it was pretty evident to the clerks, as they saw him during the day, that the “old gaffer,” as one of the juniors most irreverently called him, was in a particularly good humour; and the aforesaid promising youth there and then announced his determination of asking “Old Grug” that very day for a holiday to visit his “surviving parient;” which request was granted after some advice about “holidays, and waiting until you’ve earned them, as I have.”

In the evening, dinner being over, after a

preliminary doing of the quarter-deck business, he answered Mrs. Adams as follows, the letter being quickly written, as it had been gradually forming itself in his mind during the day.

“Humph!” he said, as he took up the pen, “Why do women always put postscripts to their letters? And why will they always, too, underline a word almost in every other line?—humph! One, two, three, four, five—no less than eleven words and sentences underlined in the letter, and two in the postscript—insulting the intelligence of their correspondents, just as if they can’t find out the emphatic words for themselves. Humph! Humph.”

“DEAR MRS. ADAMS,—

“I can assure you that I feel most highly honoured by your confidence in this matter; and you may indeed feel certain that anything and everything which concerns you or my dear little friend, Lux, is and always will be of the greatest interest to me.

“I have carefully read your letter through several times, and presume I am right in concluding that in much of what you have said there is more or less of conjecture. However, I will suppose that what you have conjectured is among the possibilities, or even that your daughter may be beginning to look upon Mr. Reginald A’Bear ‘as something more than a friend.’ You wish to know what you had better do under the circumstances ?

“Perhaps an old bachelor is not the person usually most fitted to give advice on these matters ; and yet I have a certain amount of experience—not my own, but drawn from the experiences of others—gained in transacting business, for as family lawyer I have been admitted behind the scenes on many painful occasions. My experience is this. The cause of the ruin of many young men is that they have been balked in some honourable attachment, which might have been the turning point in their lives for good, and given them a needed motive for honourable exertion ; in-

stead of which, having no fixed principles to start with, it has proved a pivot of evil and made them reckless. Parents often say that they have done everything for their children, and cannot understand why they should turn out so unhappily; but too often, from the highest to many grades below them, they have only to thank the pride of purse or family for the ruin of their sons, and for the unhappiness of their daughters also.

"Or take the other case. A girl is allowed by her parents to fall in love with some young man, and is then not allowed to engage herself to him. Her home from that moment is more or less hateful to her. She either remains there a burden to herself and every one else, or else to get away from it marries some one not for himself but for his belongings, and discovers, when too late, the mistake which she has made. Events too frequently do not stop here in such cases.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Adams, do not think that I mention these things because I think

that you have any ambitious schemes with regard to my dear little Lux. I know you too well—although she would not be very long in the London market before she would doubtless have many opportunities for changing her name to another with a handle to it.

“I know that you wish to act for the best, solely with a view to your daughter’s happiness, and my direct answer to your letter shall be also dictated solely by what I think would be most calculated to insure it.

“You write that you have ‘nothing to say against’ Mr. A’Bear. You might have put it much stronger, and said that you have ‘everything that is good’ to say of him. I happened a week or so ago to be engaged in transacting some business connected with a large school in this neighbourhood, and the head master, a very old friend of your rector, said ‘that he had known him under the most trying circumstances, and there was not a

more honourable and deeply conscientious man in the world.'

"Reginald A'Bear is far from being a poor needy fortune-hunter, and, as you say, has not sought your friendship so much as you have sought his. Everything seems to have happened in the most natural manner possible, and I am quite ready to own to the indictment that it is 'all my fault.' Should Lucy marry any one with considerable estates of his own, he would naturally reside on them during the greater part of the year, and she would be away from you; whereas if Reginald A'Bear should be the fortunate man, having no country seat of his own, she would be always with you.

"My advice is simply to do nothing for or against, but just to let things take their natural course.

"I might tell you something which would make you see things differently, perhaps, to what you see them now; but this I can state

—*If Lucy's grandfather, old Matthew Adams, were still alive, he would give the same advice.* I could, but must not, say more, and you must not ask me.

“Yours most faithfully and sincerely,
“THOMAS GRUGGEN.”

When the letter was finished, and the old gentleman had drunk the cup of coffee which the maid, a granddaughter of old “Zammel Oolcot,” had brought in, he perused it again, and by the smile which played about his lips, was evidently well pleased with the composition. He took up his pen, puckered his lips, laid his head a little on one side, and then put the quill down again, with the remark, “No, I won’t give way to their weaknesses.” Second thoughts, however, are sometimes the best, and after a turn or two up and down the room, he came back to the table, and taking up the pen once more, underlined the last sentence, observing as he made the stroke, “I suppose I must, for the

sake of little Lux ; that stroke will do the business, see if it won't."

And the letter, or the stroke, or both, did the business ; and Mrs. Adams, nothing loth, determined to let things take their course. The underlined portion certainly puzzled her. That Mr. Gruggen, after the manner of Saul, under the advice of the witch of Endor, had had an interview with the spirit of her late father-in-law was manifestly absurd ; and yet that he did mean something was as evident. And the more she thought over the matter, the more she came to the conclusion that Mr. Gruggen had intended it from the very first, had persuaded her to offer the living to Reginald A'Bear, with the express hope that Lucy might fall in love with him.

" Could Matthew Adams have ever expressed such a wish to Mr. Gruggen ?"

Ah ! a sudden thought entered her mind. The box, the existence of which she had almost forgotten ; could its contents have explained the meaning of this most mysterious

sentence? Mr. Gruggen was the only person in the world who knew them, and of course his remark must have some reference to its concealed documents. She never remembered him to have underlined a sentence before during all the years she had known him, and in the many letters which she had received from him; and there must have been a very strong reason indeed for him to have made use of it.

It was a stout, carefully drawn line, not a mere dash, or random stroke, or a wavering, quavering line, but one which said as plainly as line could, "I was drawn with great care and consideration, and the more you look at me the more you will come to the determination that I am intended to mean a great deal." So it was that the longer Mrs. Adams, of Bearcroft, looked at it, the more it seemed to mean; and the longer she looked at it, the more firmly she became convinced that there was one pole, and one pole only, to which it pointed, and that, the little oaken box, which

was lying covered with dust in the top shelf of the cupboard in her room at Bearcroft.

Mr. Gruggen's line had carried the day; and if the mother's suspicions should turn out to be correct, Reginald and Lucy would now have nothing to fear from Mrs. Adams' opposition.

CHAPTER VI.

By degrees the long winter wore away, and when the spring flowers, with their bright and cheerful blossoms, were coming out in all their beauty, and beginning to deck with their fresh and lively colours the gardens of the manor house and rectory; before, indeed, the last snowdrop had quite disappeared, Mrs. Adams and her daughter returned to Bearcroft. During the interval of their absence Reginald had met Lucy but once in London, and then only during the leisure moments of a flying business visit.

The heiress of Bearcroft found on her arrival in town that it was not one atom the less hard to concentrate her thoughts on the study upon which she was engaged than it

had been in the country. And the hindering cause was the same. When she was drawing, her mind would constantly recur to the sketches which Reginald had made when abroad and in the East, some of which he had lent her to copy; when playing or singing to the compositions which she had heard him play, and still more frequently to the duets which they had sung together; when reading or studying to the books which they had discussed, or to the subjects which he had advised; when riding in the park on her favourite "Prince" to the many pleasant canters on the Downs in the direction of the old colonel's monument, when "Tchernaya" and his master were her companions. After a time she began to ask herself what it all meant? Why she was always thinking of him and of no one else? And then, by degrees, not the first time, she asked herself the question, nor the second, nor the third, but by degrees the answer came, faint at first, then clear and distinct. It was shortly after

Reginald A'Bear's visit to London that the first gentle whisper of the answer sounded in her ear, but echoed in her heart, and she understood that she loved him, loved him very dearly indeed ; and of course, having once made the discovery, the more she thought about the matter the stronger the feeling grew. If she had ever felt any doubts on the matter, they would have been driven away by the consequences of a remark made to her by Emma Burgess, when engaged one morning in dressing the dark brown locks of her young mistress.

“Whether there was anything between Miss Lucy and Mr. A'Bear?” had been the theme of conversation in the debating society held underground in the kitchen during supper time on the previous evening. The cook, who had had much experience in her time in such matters, principally in the baker, butcher, and when in London, policeman rank of life; the housemaids, upper and under, two sisters verging towards fifty,

belonging to a most super-respectable family in Manchester, who had come into Somersetshire at the same time as their late master, and if they had ever indulged in any love-making, had long ago quite forgotten all about it; and the butler, a staid married man with wife and family at Bearcroft: these all took the same view of the question, and said decidedly, "No." The opposition, who still more emphatically said "Yes," was composed of the page just growing out of buttons, "a most monstruously himpident lad," if the butler's dictum was to be accepted on the subject; the kitchen-maid, a girl about two years older than the page, who, according to the opinion of the cook, was somewhat like him in character; John Sweetbread, the groom; and Emma Burgess, keeping company at the time with John Sweetbread.

"I've seen a lot of it in the drawing room down at Bearcroft," remarked the youth in buttons.

"You himperence," ponderously answered

the butler. "I ham hastonished at your howdacity! You've seen, indeed; a lot you've seen. Hi've been, as you hall knows, in my time, in the 'ighest and most respectabullest families, and nothing has hever, to my certain knowledge, gone on in the drawing room, but might have taken place hin—hin the middle of Ide Park."

The boy here grunted, and the butler, turning a look of great severity upon him, continued, "but has hi once 'eard ha member of Parliament say, 'don't listen to 'im for a moment, ee draws 'is facts from 'is fancy, hand is hargiments from 'is himagination.' "

This was intended as a crusher for the precocious buttons, but it fell harmlessly; perhaps the meaning was rather above his comprehension, for he determinately answered with more emphasis than argument—

"I've seen lots."

"I don't see, Mr. Whitehouse," the pert young lady's maid interposed—who, having been head of her class at school, was accus-

tomed always to use the choicest language—coming to the rescue, for it seemed likely that the harmony of the kitchen was about to be seriously disturbed—“How we can avoid drawing our arguments from our imagination in such a matter; but I must say I agree with Joe that Mr. A’Bear and Miss Lucy are sweet on one another.”

“Law! Hemma, how can you think so?” exclaimed Mrs. Sanger, the cook—(policeman A. 41 being at the time very assiduous in his morning calls). Hif the parson were really meaning hanything, would he have only come up to town once during hall this time?”

“Of course, Mrs. Sanger,” she replied, sarcastically, “I cannot pretend to your experience in these matters, but I keep my eyes open. Before Mr. A’Bear came to the rectory, anything was good enough; but now Miss Lucy has grown quite particular, especially when he is coming to dine, or she is likely to meet him, and what does that mean, I should like to know?”

“And the many rides they takes together to th’ old squire’s monument?” observed the groom.

“And the flowers she always puts into her hair when he is coming?” remarked the maid.

“And liking me to be a long way behind, and asking no questions?” rejoined her young man.

“And standing of an evening looking out of the window in the direction of the rectory?” again she argued.

“And sending “Prince” out for exercise when she know he’s not a coming?” put in the groom.

“And always wearing the colours which he likes?” affirmed the maid.

John Sweetbread’s arguments, being all of the horse, horsey, were by this time exhausted; but Buttons having recovered his courage, took up the burden, and proceeded—

“And arranging the table always when he’s acoming?”

“And blushing when his name is mentioned?” continued the maid. [This was a fact dictated by the fancy.]

“And singing songs with him all the evening, and practising ‘em all the day?” concluded the page.

“And longing so to get back again to Bearcroft,” finished the damsel, drawing her final argument from the imagination.

“Law! Hemma! how you do go hon; you quite takes my breath away,” replied Mrs. Sanger, who was of a somewhat apoplectic habit of body, after a moment’s pause; while the prim upper housemaid added—

“Surely, Emma, you don’t mean to say that you think Miss Lucy is trying to catch Mr. A’Bear! I am sure she has been brought up much too respectable.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you call being brought up much too respectable,” retorted Emma, with a toss of the head, “but I am very glad that Miss Lucy has *feelings*,” (emphasizing the word) “and for my part, I

don't see at all why she should not let him know it, if she cares for him. Why, John, I believe, would have been dangling and shilly-shallying on now, if I had not helped him a bit."

John laughed, while the butler replied with dignity—

"Law ! Hemma ! 'ow hignorantly you speaks ; just has hif the members hof the hupper classes do such things hin the same way as you and John ; has hif they'd bemean themselves to it."

"A good thing if they would," she interrupted him, rising from her seat as he was about apparently to give a description of the proper method from the Whitehouse point of view ; "but if I stay here any longer, Miss Lucy will be ringing her bell, and wanting to know what has kept me so long ;" and she moved towards the door, having determined, in her own mind, to try and find out something more certain before many days were over. By the next morning she had arranged

her plan, and having offered a few observations leading up to the remark which she wished to make, Emma Burgess said—

“I think, Miss Lucy, that our station in life has one advantage over yours.”

“How so, Emma?” asked her young mistress from beneath her curls.

“Why, miss, it seems to me that we are much more free to choose those whom we take a fancy to for our partners. Suppose we both think the same, and the fancy is mutual, that is all we have to think about—we have no one to consult except ourselves. But, miss, in your station in life, there seems to me to be so many impediments in the way as if on purpose to prevent people doing as they like; there’s this person and that to be consulted, and all manner of questions to be asked, and papers to be signed, so that, miss, when people really get married at last, I expect it is very often not to the person they would have chosen for themselves.”

Emma's plot had been successful, and by the time the garrulous girl had ceased, her young mistress felt that she was blushing from head to foot, so that there was no need for the maid to look into the glass before her to note the effect of her words.

"I daresay you are right," Lucy answered, as Emma Burgess paused for a reply; "but from what I have seen, I should say there were as many happy marriages in one station of life as another; I am afraid the fancy, as you call it, does not always last very long, and it might be all the better if there were a few impediments in the way sometimes."

"Perhaps so, miss," the maid rejoined, "but still I think we are more free in our choice; more like the birds, who have just to fix upon the place for their nest, and set to work to build it, and the thing is done."

As the hair was now dressed, and Lucy had recovered her equanimity, she rose up and answered, laughing—

“Really, Emma, you are more absurd than ever ; fancy comparing yourself and John to a pair of birds ! But you know they don’t always build in the wisest places, and I hope you may be more fortunate than that unhappy pair of robins which poor old Samuel drove about from place to place last year.”

Emma was a wise diplomat in her station of life, and having accomplished her object, quietly dropped the subject for that of a dress which she was engaged in making ; but that same evening in the kitchen, the damsel, looking wondrous wise, made the mysterious communication “that she could say a great deal if she chose on a certain subject ; but they might take her word for it that as sure as eggs were eggs, they would not be at Bearcroft very long before something would happen.”

Such being the state of affairs, it may be supposed that by every one in that comfortable house in Belgravia, the return to Bearcroft, now close at hand, was looked forward

to with more than ordinary interest. And how was the young rector also looking forward to the reappearance of the family at the Manor House, and the renewal of his intimacy with them ? was it with feelings of equal anxiety ?

Long before they had left for London, the stern look had completely disappeared from his face, and gleams of joy and happiness brightened it instead ; and by the time they had departed he had already commenced to experience in his heart the recuperative powers of a new affection. Lucy's talents and intelligence, the unreserved freshness and naïveté of her remarks, her warm and generous enthusiasm in whatever she undertook, the similarity of their tastes and the many things which they had in common, had interested him deeply. Having once loved Lorna Maitland so dearly, he had somewhat rashly come to the conclusion that though he might very possibly marry at some future time, it was not at all likely that he would

ever really love again ; but before the end of the year in which he had placed her hand in O'Connor's had come, he had discovered, somewhat to his own astonishment, that his premises had not warranted the conclusions which he had drawn from them. The mere interest and pleasure of meeting an agreeable and lively companion would never have made him look forward so eagerly to the pleasant rides, and still more pleasant, if less frequent, walks, to the harmonious and quickly-flying evenings. Mere interest would never have made him find Lucy's face appearing, and her sayings and doings cropping up at all sorts of unexpected and unreasonable times.

The evening before their departure for London had been spent by him at Bearcroft, and shortly before he left, Lucy had said laughingly—

“ Do you know, Mr. A’Bear, that when I first saw you in the pulpit, you inspired me with such awe that I thought you a most formidable personage ; I am sure if any one had

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told me that I should sing a duet with you on the following evening, I never should have believed them. I have often thought that I have never again seen the same look in your face which it had on that evening when you preached about the uses of adversity and prosperity."

"I am sure I ought to be very glad that your first impressions in this case proved to be wrong," he answered, "or I should since have lost many a pleasant hour. I dare-say my face did look rather long the first Sunday; I suppose I must have been very seriously impressed with the responsibility and solemnity of the time, which I am afraid must have been gradually wearing away ever since."

A few days afterwards, when seated alone in the Rectory study, he discovered that somehow or other the words "Lucy Adams," in various cabalistic hieroglyphics had made their appearance on the blotting book before him; this suggested a line of thought, and

so, some few weeks before, the same idea had finally developed itself in the mind of the heiress of Bearcroft, he began to ask himself the question, "What it all meant?" The answer was not long in coming, and it told him very plainly that the reply he had made to Lucy's question the evening before she started for London had not been quite correct; for that the real cause of the change in the expression of his countenance had been the young lady herself.

Having made this discovery, the question which naturally followed was, "What is to be done?" With the past history, and the possible future of his life before him, many thoughts, as may be supposed, passed and repassed rapidly through his mind; and as an aid to future reflection, to clear his mind preparatively, or to avoid the necessity of immediate thought, he rang the bell and ordered "Tchernaya" to be saddled. A canter across the park, a brisk trot by the side of the road, and a rattling gallop over the downs

soon brought him to the foot of his grandfather's monument; where at his last visit—for he well remembered how she looked—Lucy Adams, joyous and happy, had been with him; and as “Tchernaya,” excited with the gallop, stood sniffing the western breeze and impatiently pawing the ground, his master, with head erect, with proudly joyous countenance, gazed across the broad and fertile valley, and hoped that after all it might once again be his.

“Thank God,” he said to himself, as he turned the horse’s head in the direction of Bearcroft, “that I love Lucy for herself alone, that I have never tried to gain her love in order to get back the property.” He called to mind how her face, especially of late, had brightened up whenever they had met, and how happy she had always seemed to be in his company, which fact, her heart frank and confiding and heedless at present of the cause, had not admonished her to conceal; and he doubted not for an instant but that

she loved him already, or that a very little would help her to the discovery.

"It was all for the best," he said to himself more than once. "What I felt at the time to be so dread a misfortune and disappointment will prove in the end to have been ordered for the best; and I am sure that if it should all come right in the end, none will rejoice more heartily than Lorna O'Connor and her husband."

And then, though comparisons are odious, he could not help comparing his old love and his new. One thing was quite certain, that the person who had finally driven Lorna's image from his heart must be her equal, one inferior could never have accomplished it; and Lucy, though inferior in beauty, was her equal in disposition, and very much her superior in intellect and attainments. Although differing in appearance almost as much as it was possible for two persons to differ, there was at the same time considerable similarity in character between Lucy

Adams and Lorna O'Connor; and Reginald A'Bear at once jumped to the conclusion, generalizing according to the erroneous custom of humanity from his own particular experience, that if a man has loved once truly and deeply, he may a second time also, but that the attracting influence must be a similarity in character and disposition. The latter end of January was spent at Burrscombe, when he met again his old friends whom he had married about the same time in the previous year. All noticed the great change which had come over him: Lorna alone rightly divined the cause.

Reginald had made one mistake in his life through reticence, and had learnt wisdom from experience, and determined that it should be through no fault of his if Lucy did not quickly discover what was the nature of his feelings towards her; and that her mother also should have nothing to blame but her own want of perception, if she should remain ignorant on the subject. Under the

circumstances, therefore, it was with considerable anxiety that he also saw the day drawing nearer upon which Mrs. Adams had announced her intention of returning to Bearcroft.

When at length they did meet one less observant of human nature than the young rector might have supposed from Lucy's manner that she had somewhat repented of the friendship which she had formerly entertained for him, or that the rides, once the cause of so much mutual enjoyment had ceased to be a pleasure, and that during her stay in London, she had become suddenly sickened of the studies which had formerly so deeply interested her; for she seemed once again to have become retransformed into the demure and retiring maiden of the first few hours of their acquaintance. Reginald A'Bear, however, read the signs of the times better; by degrees her natural frankness and warm-heartedness re-asserted itself, her timidity disappeared; and before the anni-

versary of their first meeting on the high road at the entrance to the park had come round, she welcomed him with the same bright, happy, winning smile as heretofore.

For some time the butler somewhat crowded over Miss Emma Burgess, and even the page, who could no longer "see lots" in the drawing room, was inclined to desert his colours and join the opposite faction, with the remark "that Miss Lucy must have changed her mind." But Emma, beside having the immediate feelings of her own heart to draw experience from, by which she was able very clearly to draw conclusions as to the meaning of some of Miss Lucy's actions, had noticed, on the evening of their arrival, when pretending to be very busily engaged in the mysteries of unpacking, that contrary to her usual custom her young mistress had waited in her own room until the young rector had entered the drawing room; that her face had changed colour when the ring at the hall door had resounded through the house; that she had

waited for a few moments at the head of the stairs until the blush had disappeared, with her hand upon her heart as if to stop its too rapid throbbing ; and then, instead of tripping down the stairs as usual, had descended slowly with hesitating step. All these outward tokens had Emma noticed, and then formed her own conclusions ; so after sharply reproving the precocious youth in buttons with the retort, " Change her mind, indeed, not likely ; it's only the men who do that," only deigned with the usual toss of the head to answer Mr. Whitehouse in monosyllables, as she replied—" We shall see ! we shall see !" Before the end of May had come the butler had seen reasons for coming round to her opinion, which change of mind he thus announced one evening as the party in the servant's hall were about to separate, " Hemma, you've the better hof me, hi gives hin, hand surrenders at discretion. Hit's hall hup with Mrs. Ha' Bear has his to be ; hat least hif hit hisn't hit hought to be.

Hand, Hemma, has far has hi'me concerned
hi'me quite agreeable, hi withdraws my hopo-
sition. Hi 'ave lived has you hall knows hin
my time hin the 'ighest and most respecta-
bullest families, hand hi gives you my word
for hit, that Mr. Ha'Bear his a gentleman,
one hof the holden time."

"Sha'nt we have some fun when they're spliced," taking for granted that everything was settled, exclaimed Joe, who ought to have been instantly demolished by the look of horror and astonishment at his vulgarity, when thus discussing the affairs of his betters, which was cast upon him by the super-respectable upper housemaid; but he sat on totally unabashed, while Emma, loftily enjoying her victory, answered the butler, "Perhaps, Mr. Whitehouse, for the future you will think that I am not quite so blind, so utterly destitute of discernment as you would seem to have imagined; and will remember that I am not accustomed to make observations on such

matters without having reasons sufficient for what I say."

Day followed day, however, and Reginald had not yet proferred his request. It had more than once been on his lips but had died away again, so that the evening preceding Lucy's nineteenth birthday, to be celebrated by a grand ball to which half the county had been invited, found him sitting in the rectory garden musing over the matter. About the same time on the previous evening Lucy had been sitting by his side in an ivy-covered rustic temple in the pleasure grounds, where he had played for many an hour as a child, listening to the nightingales which were singing all around them. More than once in the pauses of their song he had nearly told her the one thought which was uppermost in his mind, however various the aspects which it might assume—while she from no clearly defined reason, was feeling, as she told him afterwards, very uncomfortable; but somehow or other the

words would not come; some invisible but malicious sprite seemed to pull them back when half out of his mouth—the will was there but the muscles of the tongue refused to act; and so they merely sat on side by side, thinking, listening. It was one of those hours in life which if they had never met again could never have been forgotten by either, even if they had lived to the age of Methuselah, when spirit communed with spirit, and heart spoke to heart. One determination he came to that evening, after bidding her good night, when walking home down the old avenue—not to let such another opportunity slip by, but to speak the very next time they were alone together.

During that night the song of the nightingale, but especially its deeper notes, by which it is so pre-eminently distinguished above all other songsters, seemed ringing in his ears, as he dreamt that he was still sitting on the seat with Lucy by his side; and then they changed into the music of a song which he

had heard her sing a few days before; and then she herself seem to have assumed the feathers of the bird; and then it all was altered again, and so on *ad infinitum*, like the shifting figures in a mental kaleidoscope. At last she once more took her own shape again, and then suddenly seemed to grow every moment brighter and brighter and more dazzling, while the woods on every side resounded with the songs of innumerable birds, and he awoke, and found that on the previous evening he had neglected to pull down the blinds, so that the sun just risen was shining full upon his face, and the medley of sweet sounds which he had heard was nothing more nor less than the morning hymn of the many songsters in the old garden beneath his window, joyously welcoming the rosy tints of the early dawn, saluting the return of light. How fit a commencement it was, he thought, of the nineteenth birthday of Mr. Gruggen's favourite "little Lux"—the light of his heart

now, and who he hoped would soon be the light of his home also.

Breakfast over, he took a poem, written after his return home on the previous evening, from the drawer in which he had deposited it, and read it through again. It was supposed to describe the song of the nightingale to which they had just been listening, with perhaps rather less of folly in it than might have been expected from a composition written under such auspices. There was not a word in it which directly spoke of love; but he thought, as he folded it up again, with a short note, wishing her many happy returns of the day, that Lucy would have no difficulty in discovering the feelings which were in his heart when he wrote it.

Shortly afterwards "Tchernaya," whose coat shone in the sun like the richest satin, was brought round to the front door; and taking the letter and an oblong box carefully wrapped up in white paper under one arm, and throwing the bridle over the other, he

walked up to Bearcroft and rung the bell. On the appearance of Joe, with an extra polish on his cheeks, and a broader grin on his countenance than usual, he gave them into his hands for his young mistress, with strict injunctions to be very careful not to drop the box; and then mounting "Tchernaya," trotted briskly across the park.

Although it was a day upon which many excuses might easily have been discovered for dereliction of duty, Reginald A'Bear had no intention to neglect his parochial work, and glad of some object for his ride, was on his way to visit the wife of one of the game-keepers who lived at the angle of "The girt (great) 'ood," as it was called; but his mind was naturally much more intent upon what might be the nature of Lucy's thoughts at that moment, than on the mission upon which he was engaged. When the park gate had been passed through, he crossed the road, and opened another, from which a rough farm track led through some fields towards the

cottage where the young woman was lying. At the last gate leading into the neighbouring field, which was fastened in a very rustic manner by a rustic and very rusty triangular padlock to an old pollard ash, he left "Tchernaya." He stayed but a short time in the cottage, for the sufferer was very weak, administering to her the spiritual consolation which she needed, and at his exit was accompanied by the husband on his way to the great house for some wine and beef-tea for his wife. On their arrival at the corner of the great wood, what was their astonishment to see "Tchernaya" going through the most extraordinary antics; there was no animal or human being except themselves apparently nearer to him than a good couple of hundred yards, but the poor brute was now rearing on his hind legs, now tugging at the bridle which was too strong to be broken, and buckled too carefully to slip, now kicking violently for a minute together, and snorting and screaming all the while as though in the extremity of

terror or pain, or both. The two men both uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and hurried forward, but before they reached the unfortunate animal, the gamekeeper had solved the cause of "Tchernaya's" sudden fright.

"There muzt be, maizter," he said, "a harnet's nezt in thick ther wold ashen stick. Oi carl to moind that oi zeed one a-buzzzen aboot ther yezterday vorenoon."

And so it proved, either "Tchernaya" in nibbling the leaves, or perhaps his master in climbing over the gate, had disturbed them, and so with one accord they had fallen on the poor beast. Happily it was early in the year, or he would only have escaped the horrors of the Crimea and the bullets of the Russians to die at last by the sting of an insect. Reginald, having pulled up the collar of his coat and drawn his hat over his eyes, was about to rush forward at all risks and try either to unbuckle or cut the bridle, but was held back by the gamekeeper, who exclaimed at the same time—

"Doan't ee, maizter, let oi zettle un;" which he did very simply by putting the gun to his shoulder, waiting until the horse was out of the line of fire, and then aiming at the bridle, which was pulled tight against the top bar, cut the leather in half, making at the same time a hole through the wood about the size of a florin.

Released from durance vile, and from his petty, though dangerous assailants, away started the horse like the wind by the way which he had come, almost mad with pain and terror; and from the summit of the hedge, but at a safe distance from the "wold ashen stick," they watched him clearing, in his mad career, one five-barred gate after another, until he arrived at the park gate, which happened to be open, for the shepherd with his donkey cart was passing through at the same moment. A collision seemed to be inevitable, for the man seeing the terrified animal tearing along at the top of his speed, tried to lead the cart out of the way, but only

managed to turn the donkey a little more sideways; the next moment, with a snort and a bound, "Tchernaya" was up to them and over them—which after all was no very such wonderful jump (there was merely the look of the thing, which we may well suppose not to have troubled his brain under the circumstances)—and then continued flying along at the same furious speed across the park in the direction of the house. The rest of his course was hid by a small plantation, and the two men, leaping to the ground, hastened on his tracks.

CHAPTER VII.

As Master Joseph closed the door, the thought instantly crossed his mind that if the butler, whom he had left in the dining room arranging the supper table, was to see the box, he would insist most likely upon delivering it himself; but at the same time the youth determined not to lose the pleasure of depositing them in Miss Lucy's hands if he could avoid it. He knew that she was in the library by herself, and so could just have taken them in there and then, and given them to her; but Mr. Whitehouse having educated him thus far with considerable care, trained him in fact to do everything in the "highest and most respectabullest manner," his thoughts, as he stood for a moment pensively

on the mat, were bent on discovering the best plan to circumvent that important functionary, doubly important on such an occasion, and to obtain the silver waiter from the dining room, from under his very nose.

At that moment, happily for his perplexity, his ally, Emma Burgess, appeared at the foot of the stairs, and Joe at once hastened towards her, putting the forefinger of his unoccupied hand to his lips, with the whispered remark, "Here's a go."

The lady's maid understood the whole matter at a glance, and her ready wit quickly told him how to accomplish his purpose; so putting the box into her hand, he walked boldly into the dining room. Mr. Whitehouse immediately asked him—

"Who was that hat the 'all door?"

"Only Mr. A'Bear with a letter for Miss Lucy," the boy answered; and before the pompous, but somewhat slow, head official of the dining room had collected his ideas sufficiently to make any remark on the com-

munication, the expeditious youth, waiter in hand, had left the room, and immediately, having received back the box from Emma, entered the library.

If Lucy Adams had tried ever so much she could not have concealed the joy and pleasure which the unexpected surprise had given her ; it lighted up her countenance, and made her eyes to sparkle with emotion as she saw the box and the letter, the first which she had ever received from *him*, lying on the salver. With assumed calmness and nonchalance, which in nowise deceived Master Joe, but with eager and trembling fingers she took them off the waiter, and laid them on her lap. Even after the boy had left the room, she could not touch them for a few moments ; she could only look at them, and try to realize the fact that they were really for her, and directed in Reginald A'Bear's bold and manly handwriting.

Perhaps the letter should have been opened first, but as it was she laid it upon the table,

took therefrom a pair of scissors, cut the string which was around the parcel, unfolded the paper, and within was a plain oblong deal box, lightly secured with a piece of white ribbon; this she untied, lifted the lid, and found within an oval-shaped morocco case, wrapped in cotton wool; eagerly she lifted it out of its deal envelope, unwrapped its covering of wool, and an involuntary exclamation of surprise and pleasure escaped from her lips as she caught the first glimpse of its contents. Reginald's birthday present to her was a complete set of the most lovely pink coral ornaments; a pair of bracelets, one of a double row of large coral and gold beads, the other of sprigs of coral in their natural state, with berries here and there between them; a necklace to suit the bracelet of large coral and gold beads, from which was pendant a coral cross with a diamond star in the centre; and a pair of earrings of the shape of a half-closed shell, with minute diamonds sprinkled on the edge, and a coral drop

hanging from the centre. After feasting her eyes on the beautiful present, she took up the letter, and felt even more nervous about breaking the seal than she had about opening the box. The letter was very short, wishing her many happy returns of her nineteenth birthday, and hoping that she would deign to accept his present as a slight return for the many pleasant hours which he had been permitted to spend with her during the past year.

The poem, it need hardly be said, she thought expressed exactly her own feelings as she had been listening to the nightingale's song. Not very long, however, did she give herself for thinking, for after hastily closing the morocco case, depositing it in the box again, and putting the letter on the top, she took the parcel in her hand, and hurrying across the hall, bounded up the stairs ; the next moment she had placed it in her mother's lap, and was kneeling on a stool at her feet, with her arms thrown round her neck.

"What is the matter, my darling?" said Mrs. Adams, as she kissed her Lucy's blushing face, "what has happened all of a sudden to distress you so? Has Mr. Gruggen been giving you a too magnificent birthday present?" Mr. Gruggen was staying in the house, and she knew that such was his intention, as he had shown her the parcel carefully wrapped up on the previous evening; and the two packets were of much about the same shape.

"Oh, no, mamma," she answered, blushing still more deeply, and hiding her face on her mother's shoulder; "it is not from him, but from someone else; and you are to open it and see for yourself."

Mrs. Adams at once unwrapped the parcel, and when she observed the young rector's handwriting on the envelope, and had opened the case and seen how very handsome were its contents, she looked grave.

Lucy immediately noticed the change of expression, and said, anxiously, as she clung to her mother—

"You are not angry with me, mamma?"

"No, my love," she answered, "not in the least; I have nothing to be angry with you about."

"Then why do you look so grave? You don't think that I ought to send them back?" she asked, in a tone which plainly showed how very sorry she would be to have to adopt any such suggestion.

"That will depend, you know, Lucy, entirely upon yourself; but you must understand that this is something more than a simple birthday present; young men do not send presents of this description unless they mean something more than friendship. I suppose I may look at the letter," she added, taking it up.

"Oh, yes, mamma," she responded eagerly, as her face burned again; "I wanted you to know everything, but I don't like you to look so solemn."

The mother read the letter and the song; she felt the quick throbbing of her daughter's

heart ; saw it's secret—no longer a secret—revealed in every lineament of her countenance ; and the same instant, the sympathy of a mother for her daughter took the place of any graver feeling, and with tears standing in her eyes she strained her child closer to her bosom, and as she kissed her burning brow, asked in a voice trembling with emotion—

“ Lucy, my own child, do you feel very, very happy ?”

But Lucy could not answer ; she only clung the tighter, and hid her face upon her mother's neck ; and there they remained for some time, till Mrs. Adams observed—

“ Suppose you go and find Mr. Gruggen, and show them to him, and see what he says.”

“ Then I may keep it if I like ?” asked the young lady.

“ Yes, if you wish,” her mother answered ; and Lucy Adams did wish.

The boudoir in which they were overlooked the park, indeed, on that side the park extended quite up to the walls of the mansion ;

and Lucy, having risen from her knees, was engaged in packing up her present, when, happening to lift her eyes for a moment, immediately the box dropped from her hands on to the table, while an exclamation of terror and alarm escaped from her lips as she hastened to the window. Mrs. Adams immediately arose from her seat, and was just in time to see "Tchernaya," covered with foam, bleeding from a wound in the side, rush madly by beneath the window, plunging wildly along, with the broken bridle trailing behind him. They looked across the park, but there were no signs of his master, and Lucy at once came to the conclusion that some evil must have befallen him, and cried out with an exceeding bitter cry—

"What can have happened? He must have been thrown, and perhaps is now lying insensible, or is dying!" and was preparing to rush from the room, whither she knew not. But the revulsion of feeling from her previous joy was too great, a deadly pallor spread over

her face, and she would have fallen had not her mother caught her in her arms. She led her to the sofa, and bathed her forehead with eau-de-Cologne from a bottle on the mantelpiece, ringing the bell at the same time for Emma, who immediately appeared with the welcome intelligence that she had seen Mr. A'Bear running across the park with another man. This last news, however, brought on a violent fit of hysterics, and for some minutes, her late sorrow and her new joy, as she discovered how needlessly she had alarmed herself, seemed to struggle for the mastery, as Lucy now laughed, then cried, now laughed again, and then cried and laughed at the same time. Care does not kill very often, or joy either, and after some time she grew quiet again; and her mother then made her lie down, and pulling one of the curtains partly across the window, so as to shade her eyes, left the room in order to discover the cause of "Tchernaya's" strange appearance; while Emma Burgess, who was busy making a final

alteration in Mrs. Adams' evening dress, remained in the next room, to be close at hand in case her young mistress should ring.

It was a long time before "Tchernaya" would allow himself to be caught, not indeed, until "Prince" had been saddled, and John Sweetbread had ridden up beside him, and seized the broken bridle. He was then led to the stable, where he remained for some days; all the hair came off his back, and he did not quite recover his appearance for many months. As long as he lived, which was for many years afterwards, such was his lively recollection of the topography of the "wold ashen stick," at the leaves of which he had unadvisedly nibbled, that though perfectly obedient in every other respect, nothing could ever induce him to enter the rough track that led to it.

As soon as Reginald had seen his unfortunate steed safe in the stable, and had attended to his wants, he hastened up to Bearcroft, in order to give a history of the

occurrence, and by a personal exhibition of himself to prove that he had sustained no injury.

He was shown into the library, where he found Mrs. Adams and Mr. Gruggen, but no Lucy, and he wondered what could have become of her. He commenced, and gave a description of "Tchernaya's" misadventure, but still no Lucy. Was she, then, not to be allowed to meet him again? At last, Mrs. Adams, divining the cause of his anxious look, and altered tone of voice, answered his mute inquiries—

"I see you are wanting to know what has become of Lucy. She was so frightened at seeing poor "Tchernaya" suddenly rush by, that she had a fit of hysterics, and as she has so much to go through before the day is over, I made her lie down on the sofa in the boudoir; or else I am sure she would have been here long ago to thank you in person for the very beautiful present which you brought her this morning.

His fears, then, were groundless; Lucy was not to be hindered from seeing him; indeed her alarm for his safety was the cause of her present absence and distress. He made no answer, however, to Mrs. Adams' remark, but adopting men's usual resource in perplexity, played with his hat, and seemed to be examining with considerable interest a large rose about twice the size of nature, the most conspicuous object in the pattern of the library carpet. His heart seemed almost too full to speak, and yet, had Mrs. Adams been alone, he would somehow or other have managed to have told her everything, and have asked permission at once to seek her daughter and declare his love; but Mr. Gruggen was in the way. That gentleman, however, observing the state of affairs, instinctively came to the conclusion that, under present circumstances, his absence, rather than his presence, would be of most service to his dear little Lux; and with a queer look, full of meaning to Mrs. Adams, and a glance

as though to direct her attention to the picture of her late father-in-law which was over the mantel-piece, and which very clearly said, "remember that old Matthew Adams would approve," he quietly passed through the open window, and walked quickly away into the shrubberies. During the next hour, he gave full play to his bottled up excitement, indulging to the full in the Gruggenian antics, laughing and chuckling to himself, and not only rubbing his hands in ecstasy, but stopping occasionally to double the right hand, and knock it forcibly into the open palm of the left, as though a brighter thought than usual had suddenly struck him.

Reginald was so occupied with his own thoughts, that he did not observe the almost noiseless exit of the honest little lawyer; and when he lifted his eyes was somewhat astonished to find that the old gentleman had vanished. Still for another moment he continued to twirl his hat with the same air of perplexity.

"Mrs. Adams," he began at length, in as calm a voice as he could assume, "I am so glad that Lu—Miss Adams, I mean, likes the present I sent her." The very sound of his own voice, however, seemed to give him the assurance which he needed, and with a gulp and an effort out it all came in a rapid torrent of words—

"But I feel that I cannot keep silence; that I must speak," he recommenced, "upon the one thought which has been uppermost in my mind for weeks and months. I have never tried to conceal it from you; if I have, I had no such intention; I wished you to know it. I love your daughter—how dearly it is impossible to say—and if you will give her to me, my whole life shall be dedicated to make her happy. I know that some people may say that I have only tried to gain her love in order to get back the property; but indeed it is not so. I love her for herself, for her self alone; and I think, I know, that she loves me in return. May I not go at

once, and tell her everything. I feel as if I could not let this day pass without learning the truth from her own lips?"

"If I had had any objection," she answered, rising, "you may be sure that I should not have allowed you to be so much together; a mother's eyes are very quick in perceiving anything connected with the happiness of a child, especially when that child is an only daughter; and I think that I saw what was likely to happen before either of you were altogether aware of it yourselves. So if you can curb your impatience a little longer, I will go and find out if Lucy is well enough to see you, only you must not stay too long, or else she will not be able to appear this evening at all."

Mrs. Adams found her daughter very much better, and sitting up by the window—

"Do you feel better, my love?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "I feel quite well again."

"Then do you think you are well enough to see Mr. A'Bear; he is downstairs in the library, and wants to come and tell you all about the accident, and show you that he has received no injury; you can thank him at the same time for his beautiful present. Shall I show him the way?" and as she stooped down and gave her daughter a kiss, she added smiling, "or shall I tell him that he must wait till the evening?"

"Oh, no, mamma," she quickly rejoined, "I should not like him to wait; but you will come back, too?"

"I think that I had better not," she answered; "I fancy that he would sooner see you by himself; I think that he has something rather particular to tell you," and she gave her another kiss and left the room.

Reginald had been waiting impatiently in the library, and was not long in acting upon Mrs. Adams' suggestion. "I think that you know your way to the boudoir; Lucy will be very glad to thank you for your present,

but you must not stay too long, or else she will have to disappear altogether for the rest of the day."

As soon as he entered the room, Lucy, who was all of a tremble, and feeling very nervous, came forward to meet him, saying—

"How can I ever thank you enough for your beautiful present?"

"By wearing it to-night," he answered, as he took the hand which she held out to him, and then added, "I am glad that it has given you so much pleasure."

"Do please tell me all about poor 'Tchernaya's' accident," she interposed quickly, as though afraid of what he might say on another matter, and gently disengaging her hand, sat down again by the window.

Reginald A'Bear sat down on the opposite side, and having told her the facts, asked—

"Were you very much alarmed when you saw 'Tchernaya' rush riderless by the window?"

"Yes," she replied, looking across the

park, "I am afraid that I was very foolish, and nearly fainted. I thought that you might be dead, or dying, and when Emma said that she saw you running across the park, I was more foolish still, and had an attack of hysterics."

She looked for a moment into his face, and her eyes quickly dropped again, she saw there plainly what was coming. The moment had arrived at last, and Reginald, rising from his seat, came over and took her now unresisting hand, and pleaded—

"Lucy, my darling Lucy, tell me why you were so alarmed. Say that you love me, dearest. I have known that I loved you for months; say that you will make me happy; say that you love me, that you will be my own dear wife, my own little Lux."

She did not answer; and he pleaded his cause again and again. She would have answered him if she could; but little Lux felt as though she were about to have another fit of hysterics; and sure enough in

another moment she was lying in his arms, crying as if her heart would break while he was kissing away the tears faster than they fell ; soothing her with every fond term that affection could devise, and calling her again and again, "his own little Lux, the light and darling of his heart."

By degrees the attack passed away, and though she had not yet spoken the word, he knew that his happiness was secured, and that she had consented to be his.

After a while, the promise to her mother occurred to him, and he said—

" Lucy, dearest, I promised only to stay for a short time, as you have so much to go through to-day," and then, in the same words which he had used once before in his life, he begged, " but will you not give me one little kiss before I go, and make me happy ? "

She gave it him, but such a gentle one that he could hardly feel it. As he rose to leave, some lovely pink rosebuds, which,

trained against the wall, were peeping in at the window, caught his eye. He leant forward, and picked the most beautiful of the cluster, one just passing from bud to blossom ; and as he placed it in her hand, said—

“ It will just suit the coral. You know that you have not yet said ‘ yes,’ but if you wear that in your hair to-night, I shall know what it means.”

That evening, the heiress of Bearcroft appeared in the old hall—the ball room for the nonce—radiant with smiles of joy and happiness, apparently none the worse, but rather the better for the events of the morning ; wearing the coral ornaments, and a beautiful old fashioned rose-coloured ruby ring, a family heirloom, the gift of her lover shortly before the guests had arrived, while the only ornament in her hair was the pink rosebud just bursting into bloom.

The two lovers, according to previous agreement, spoke very little to one another during the evening, but before it had sped

away, it was pretty well known by most of the guests how affairs stood between them. In fact, the dear old gossip of the neighbourhood, one of the earliest to arrive, after giving the young lady a kiss, for she was one of the kissing sort, and wishing her many happy returns of the day, had at once asked point blank, who had given her the coral ornaments.

"Mr. A'Bear," answered Lucy simply and immediately, for it was of no use to make a mystery of it.

"And the rose, too, I suppose?" asked the old lady.

"And the rose, too," she replied, while her face changed to the same colour as the flower; and she was very glad to hasten away immediately afterwards to greet some fresh arrivals, and so escaped any further questioning.

It would have been as hopeless to have expected a sieve to hold water as for that dear old soul to have obtained a piece of news

without retailing it far and wide, so that before very long it was well understood by every one in the room who it was that had given the heiress of Bearcroft the set of coral, "and the rose, too, my dear." When, too, at supper, the member of the county, who had been first returned with Reginald's father some thirty years before, in proposing her health, said "that he hoped that they would all meet again before long, on a still more auspicious occasion;" there needed not the glitter of the ruby ring on the fourth finger of the left hand, or the ruby dye upon her cheeks, to tell the assembled guests the meaning of the remark; and when he wished Reginald A'Bear good bye, it was with a warm and hearty shake of the hand, that he said—

"I congratulate you from my heart, A'Bear. I have not heard anything for many a year which has given me such pleasure. It is just as it should be. Our houses have always been great allies, and your

father and I were great friends, and I hope it may be the same in days to come. I am very glad indeed," he said again as he went to look for the rest of his family, "nothing could have turned out better."

When the formal announcement of the engagement between the heir of the A'Bear's and the heiress of Bearcroft was made public, many and multiform were the remarks made upon so remarkable and interesting an occurrence. "That it was just as it should be," was the general verdict of the county and neighbourhood. The baronet and M.P. of the neighbouring county, who had attended the auction mart of Messrs. Bland and Parker on the occasion of the sale of the estates, and had been cogitating on the fact more or less ever since, began to see things in a different light, and to think that after all perhaps England was not going to the dogs; and to wish, indeed, that his eldest son might follow young A'Bear's example.

The tenantry rejoiced greatly ; while the cottagers in the immediate neighbourhood of Bearcroft fairly went wild with delight. That they should keep Miss Lucy, who, with her mother, had endeared herself to their hearts by innumerable acts of kindness, and at the same time get back again the grandson of "th'old squire," seemed the very perfection of events.

Old Zammel's wife asserted that it was "juzt a needz-be."

Some of the neighbours observed that "facts were stronger than fiction, and that some new Shakespeare ought to write a new play with an old name, and call it 'All's Well that Ends Well ; or, Love's Labour Won.' "

Some said, in addition, that "A' Bear was a lucky fellow," these were principally the men ; others that "they always knew it would be," these were chiefly the women ; some that "Mrs. Adams had made up the match, and must have intended it from the beginning ;" others, but they were a miser-

able minority, that "she might have looked higher."

Mistress Woolcote, his old nurse, remarked that "zhe only wizhed wold Doffinby had been ztill aloive to zee how th' A'Bear were punizhed vor their zins ;" while Jabez Steer said many things "according to the poet."

Relatives and friends poured in congratulations from all sides, and not a little advice, as is customary on such occasions, while Winny and Lorna whispered to themselves, "poor Gerty;" and as Hugh remembered the cowardly remark he had made to his cousin at their last meeting, he felt even still more sorry than before. As for Gerty, who had been abroad since the conclusion of the Crimean war, and was coming home before the winter, to take up her abode with Mrs. A'Bear, she wrote a letter full of kind wishes, in which with all her philosophy, she said some things which she was by no means so sure that she felt. She had long steeled herself to think that some

such communication was one day probable, but when it did arrive found that stoicism was very much easier in theory than in practice.

Mrs. A'Bear, Reginald's dear old grannie, who long past the allotted age of man, still lingered on at Burrscombe, could hardly believe the communication when first made to her; and not until her "dear boy," as she still called him, had brought his future bride and her mother to visit her, did she quite realize that Bearcroft was once again to be his.

Mr. Gruggen's behaviour on the occasion of the announcement by little Lux of her engagement on the day following the ball, must be imagined; it threw every previous exhibition of Gruggenian antics and peculiarities completely into the shade; that "Matthew Adams would approve" was the especial burden of his congratulations, with the additional remark that "if it had not been for me, it would never have happened," which was true enough.

Reginald's and Lucy's happiness may be imagined also, the only quarrel they ever had was as to which was the happiest of the two. It was a season of prosperity and joy intense to both; marriage could not make them more one in heart than they were from the day of their engagement. It was a season of castle-building too, as they formed plans for benefitting the neighbourhood in which their lot was to be cast, in which the building of schools and model cottages, the restoration of churches, and the founding of alms houses and cottage hospitals were the most prominent features. As there was nothing to hinder their marriage except Lucy's youth, which hindrance grew less every day, the mother consented to the wedding taking place in the following summer, immediately after Lucy's twentieth birthday.

Reginald had therefore one more lonely season to spend in the rectory at Bearcroft; while his little Lux had to pass one more long, long winter in London, to finally com-

plete her prenuptial education, and found it harder work than ever to fix her attention, besides which two letters a week took up a deal of time.

Reginald A'Bear knew before what it was to love, but not what it was to be loved, to be told, knowing that the words were true, and came from a heart that could not lie—"I think, Reggie, that if no one else in the whole world cared for me, I should not mind so long as I knew that I had your love." Our passions and feelings are like the winds, which are a help to the vessel as long as they blow calmly and steadily; but if suffered to rise beyond a certain pitch, they are a hindrance to her progress, and may possibly overwhelm and sink her; and there was just this difference between the passionate attachment which he had once felt for Lorna O'Connor, and the deeper and calmer, but none the less real affection which he now cherished for Lucy Adams—the former had been like the impetuous rushing of the

mountain torrent, the latter resembled more the calm and onward motion of the deep river of the valley.

The sun of prosperity, which had now risen, and the gentle and propitious south wind which had now commenced to blow upon him, seemed to have banished for ever those former times when the chill north winds of adversity had worked their way with him; but those former times had set their seal upon his life and character, and he was far more fitted for the position which he was destined to occupy than he would have been if he had always continued, as he had been born, the heir of Bearcroft.

As for little Lux, her engagement opened out to her a new life, with new thoughts, and hopes, and anticipations; she had a real object in life now. Others might think that Reginald was the fortunate one, but Lucy, on the contrary, was quite certain that she was still more the one to be congratulated; and very proud was she to think that she had won his

heart, a heart that she knew full well was worth the gaining. She was content with the present, and hardly dared as yet to gaze into the future with its rich and golden hue, with its new thoughts and hopes, and constantly increasing and growing, amplifying and extending, intensifying and perfecting, visions and anticipations of coming happiness
—Poor little Lux !

CHAPTER VIII.

REGINALD was sitting one afternoon in the study engaged in writing a letter to Lucy, when he was startled by the sound of a horse galloping along the station road. It sounded nearer and nearer, and soon was scattering the gravel hither and thither as it came along the drive leading to the rectory, and as the rider pulled up suddenly before the door, some of the smaller stones were even dashed against the window. The young rector quickly rose from his seat and hastened to look out, but both horse and rider, covered with foam, were unknown to him; the meaning of the man's hurry and sudden appearance, however, were explained all too soon—

he was the bearer of a telegraphic message from Mrs. Adams which ran as follows :—

“ Come to London at once; Lucy is seriously ill with fever, and I wish you to be here. Start if possible by the next train. Come at once.”

Reginald knew that Lucy had not been quite the thing for a few days, but had thought little or nothing about it, and the suddenness of the message staggered him for a moment; but as quickly recovering himself, and telling the maid who had brought the paper into the room to wait a minute, he seized a Bradshaw lying on the table, and found that a train would pass the neighbouring station, seven miles off, in about half an hour. There was just time to catch it.

“ Miss Adams is very unwell,” he said hurriedly to the maid who had brought in the telegram, “ will you tell the groom to saddle my horse immediately; tell him to be very quick about it, as I shall be out in a minute,

and to get ready the pony to follow me to the station."

When Reginald mounted "Tchernaya" there was just five and twenty minutes to spare, but he knew that his good steed was easily equal to the task. Directly they left the rectory gates the animal, in answer to his master's call, as though he thoroughly comprehended that much depended on his exertions, started into a sharp gallop, and reached the station before the train was in; and Reginald A'Bear, having left him in charge of one of the porters at the station until his servant should arrive, was soon on his road to London. Until he was seated in the railway carriage, so rapid had been his movements that he had had no time for reflection, but now he pulled the telegram out of his pocket and read it through again. That Lucy must be in considerable danger, and suddenly taken much worse, was only too evident, of that the twice repeated injunction "to come at once" was proof sufficient; besides which Mrs.

Adams would have sent him word by letter unless she had feared for the worst. He then took out Lucy's last letter, which he had received three days before, and though she complained in it of headache and of not feeling very well, there was nothing to show that she was likely to be taken so soon and so dangerously ill, and he hoped that after all her mother might be alarming herself unnecessarily; moreover, she had youth on her side, and would have the very best advice—the thought that she might possibly be taken from him he kept away, and determined until he knew the worst to hope for the best. He had often travelled the same route before, but never had the journey seemed so long; and he was glad when the darkness began to settle over the surrounding country, as the train seemed then to move the quicker when he could no longer recognize the familiar objects by which they were passing. At length Paddington Station was reached, and throwing himself into a hansom cab, he was soon once

more hurrying on in the direction of Belgravia.

When he reached the house where poor little Lux was lying, he found that Mrs. Adams had in no wise exaggerated the state of affairs, and that her daughter was suffering from a severe attack of typhoid fever, how caught no one could give any account. Every one else in the house was perfectly well, but the poison had somehow or other entered the system, and at that very moment she was lying upstairs in a state of delirium, with the fever growing hourly in intensity. Her lover understood enough of such matters to know that his Lucy was not the best subject, with her warmly enthusiastic and nervous temperament, for a struggle with death under this form; but still he hoped for the best. He lifted up his heart and voice in earnest prayer to God for strength, and felt calm, and wondered at his calmness. The medical man was with Mrs. Adams in the sick room when he arrived, and Reginald A'Bear waited

quietly downstairs for his coming, and wondered again that he could be so calm. He placed his finger on his pulse, it was quiet and strong, and even at that moment he philosophized on the fact; but it was by no means his first trial; he had been already disciplined severely in the school of suffering, and knew the secret of strength and faithful patience. It was not the first time he had passed through the breakers.

When the medical man entered the room he rose to meet him, and at once asked what was the condition in which he had left his patient, adding, "You may have been told, perhaps, that I am engaged to be married to Miss Adams; but I am not afraid to hear the truth; I would sooner know the worst at once."

"It is a very severe case of typhoid fever," he answered, "and Miss Adams at present is in a very high state of fever indeed; but she is young and apparently of a good constitution, and while there's life there's hope, and I by

no means despair of bringing her round ; everything will depend upon careful nursing, and all my orders being carried out to the letter."

"I suppose," replied Reginald, "there is no reason that I should not take my share of nursing ; I have sat up night after night and nursed two friends in very dangerous illnesses. I could not endure to be here all the day idle."

"But are you sure that you are equal to it ? Any excitement might be her death. It will be a very different thing to nursing a mere friend ; you don't know what you may have to endure—the restraint you may have to put upon yourself."

"Feel my pulse," he answered, holding out his arm.

The physician took the wrist held out to him. "You may go," he said, after holding it for a few moments, "it is slow but sure, and better than being too quick ; it will never wear you out."

But even when the medical man had left, Reginald A'Bear refrained himself for a while, and kneeling down by the side of the table, prayed earnestly for her who was lying so ill in the room above him, that her sickness might not be unto death; and for himself, that he might be nerved to bear whatever might be in store for him.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Adams entered the room, and when she saw him, burst into tears; but the sight of his calm and peaceful face, and his words of sanguine hope and confidence, seemed to inspire her with some portion of the same feelings, and she sought the sick room again, feeling far more hopeful than she had been, since she had first known the nature of her daughter's illness.

And not only Mrs. Adams, but the whole household seemed to feel the influence of his presence; the tears which had been flowing before were in a measure dried; and Emma Burgess only expressed the general feelings of the before despondent household, when,

on the evening of the day following his arrival, she said—

"I don't know how it is, but Mr. A'Bear seems to have altered everything since he came; there's missis had a good sound sleep all last night, and has been going about all day, looking quite different. I don't know how it is, but somehow or other I begin to feel that Miss Lucy will get better."

"So do Hi, Emma," put in Mr. Whitehouse; "but it's a hawful complaint."

"You should see him in the sick room, too," she continued; "the hospital nurses say that he must have been trained to it all his life; so calm and gentle, never the least bit flurried, just as though it were anybody rather than dear Miss Lucy that he was waiting on, and seems to know exactly what to do, just as if he were the seventh child, or a doctor born. I can't understand it; for it's not as if he had no feelings; but there, I always did say, and I've told dear Miss Lucy many a time, that there never was another like Mr. Reginald,"

The remembrance of those happy days was too much for the soft-hearted girl, and she burst into tears.

“Poor dear lamb!” said the fat cook, following her example; and even the housemaids, forgetting their respectability, also joined her, and Joe, laying aside his impudence for a season, blubbered in unison; while John Sweetbread, crying not being in his line, and yet feeling as deeply as any of them, wished himself in the stable; the pompous butler feeling, as he expressed it afterwards, like a limp napkin, while a tear trickled down his well-shorn cheek, which he wiped away with the aforesaid piece of linen, which may have suggested the similitude, exclaimed in a somewhat theatrical voice—

“We har hall poor creatures, hat the best,
igh hand low, rich hand poor, one with
hanother; vanity hof vanities, hall is vanity.”
If he had read “Tristram Shandy,” he would
doubtless, by way of adding emphasis to his
words, have brought down his glass with a

smart rap upon the table, or even have let it fall with a crash upon the floor ; as it was, he made a much more practical use of it, for he put it to his lips, took a long draught of "XXX," which had been brewed under his own superintendence, and then, with a sigh of sorrow or satisfaction, or of both combined, replaced it gently on the table.

Emma Burgess was by no means the only one who could not understand Reginald A'Bear's conduct at this time.

All persons with deep and strong feelings and passions, but who in some measure have learnt to command them, whose life is real and earnest, not what Hugh had once said of his cousin's "a butterfly existence," or one entirely wrapped up in the world, live, in some respects, a double, though not necessarily hypocritical life—the one to be read of all men, the other seldom revealing itself even to those who are nearest and dearest. The pleasant smile does not always betoken joyfulness of heart, or the calm exterior peace

within, and very often none knoweth, but the heart of man himself, its bitterness, its trials, its sorrows, its disquietude. Very often, like Joseph, there is a refraining in the presence of friends and relatives, and afterwards a going into the chamber, or a retirement to some secluded spot in order to weep, or at any rate to pray there. Such was the nature of Reginald A'Bear's life at this time; he found the truth of the physician's words, "that it would be something very different to nursing a mere friend;" as day after day, with a heart hovering betwixt hope and fear, he watched the gradually wasting form, the hollowed cheek, and the eyes now lit with the febrile fires of delirium; or listened to the wild or muttered ravings of one with whom he would gladly have exchanged places if it had been possible. At times it was almost more than he could bear, as, with his own heart almost bereft of hope, he tried to instil into the heart of the mourning mother that confidence which he could not feel himself.

Mrs. Adams and others saw only the watchful readiness, the quiet, calm confidence, the apparent look of peace—sometimes even the smile of hope; but there were other chapters in his life at this time, unknown because unseen to mortal eye, which could have explained what to Emma Burgess had seemed so difficult of comprehension.

There was another who wondered also; Gertrude Sinclair, before the fever had run its course, had also come to London to assist in nursing her cousin's betrothed. Her great aunt, Mrs. A'Bear, had suggested it, for she thought that her niece's trained skill and experience might be of great service in such an emergency. Gerty, however, had hesitated for some time before she had offered her assistance; "but had not Reginald," she thought, "nursed O'Connor in the Crimea, and should she hesitate to act an equally noble part under similar circumstances?"

Her cousin's example, which had always been such a powerful incentive to her, won

the day, for she felt that if she should now refuse to act upon her aunt's suggestion, she would despise herself for the remainder of her life.

Her offer, as may be supposed, was immediately and gratefully accepted, and in a short time she was installed by the bedside of the sufferer, in the position of head nurse. Mrs. Adams especially realized the influence of her womanly sympathy, and loving good nature, and her cousin felt that her presence had done much the same for him as his coming had effected for the rest of the household, for he could talk and confide in her as he could not with any one else, except with her who was now hovering betwixt life and death.

Gertrude Sinclair knew something of the depth and strength of her cousin's feelings, for had she not for years carefully and lovingly watched him, and marked the different phases of his character, and she wondered that he could be so calm. She marked, too, what others had not noticed, the agonized

expression of intense, because heart-felt suffering which now and again appeared upon his countenance, and she wondered to see the way in which, with a mighty effort, he suppressed it, while his face almost immediately assumed again its normal look of resolute and patient endurance. She wondered and yet she understood, for her cousin, in days gone by, had taught her where to look for strength and guidance under the difficulties of life.

At length the day came when the fever had left the patient, and the anxious thought of all in that sick room was whether there was strength left in the poor racked and worn-out body to rally again ; the physicians prescribed, but hardly dared to speak a word of hope, as she lay with closed eyes like one dead, hardly breathing. When they had left the room, Reginald remained for a short time watching his darling Lucy, now more dear to him than ever. He was on one side of the bed, and Mrs. Adams and Gertrude on the other, and

there they remained silent, motionless for some five minutes or so, looking at the wasted form between them. But somehow or other during those moments of silence, for though the voice had been silent, the heart had not, hope revived within him, and he exclaimed—

“They are wrong; she will not die.”

“If the Lord will,” faltered Mrs. Adams, who was thinking at the moment of the first Sunday of Reginald A’Bear’s coming among them—of Lucy’s remark, “I am one of those persons who have never experienced anything except prosperity, upon whom the south wind only has blown”—of her answer, and how little had she then thought that their truth would be so quickly proved. “The wind bloweth where it listeth; it is God’s will that the south wind has only blown upon you as yet; when it is His will, the north wind will come.”

“Yes, if the Lord will,” he responded, but in a tone of voice which seemed to say, “I feel

that the Lord's will is that she will recover ;" while Gerty, who was nearest to him, heard him mutter to himself de Mervaille's motto, but with a very different meaning to what his friend had been accustomed to put upon it, "*Ce qu'il faut venir viendra.*"

"The chief thing we have to do," he urged in as cheery a voice as he could assume, "is to keep life within the body; a few moments of inattention may now render all our previous care of no avail; if she can only survive until this time to-morrow, I think she will recover, and I feel she will."

During those four-and-twenty hours, Reginald and his self-denying noble-hearted cousin—for Lucy's mother was completely worn out—never left the side of poor little Lux; if one rested on the sofa, the other watched, and their devotion saved her life. During that anxious day and night she drank spoonful after spoonful of brandy slightly diluted with water, enough to have made many a strong man tipsy, but it had no more

apparent effect upon her than spring water. As the day and then the night wore on, the quick and expectant eyes of her lover seemed to notice some slight signs of amendment; and when the physicians, who had visited her several times during those four-and-twenty hours of anxiety, held a consultation at her bedside on the following morning, they no longer shook their heads as they prescribed—the turn in the fever had come. When they were leaving the room the senior physician, as he shook hands with Reginald, said—

“Should Miss Adams recover, and we may reasonably hope now that such may be the case, she will owe her life not so much to our skill as to the unwearied care and devotion of yourself and Miss Sinclair.”

“God bless you, Gerty,” he said, grasping his cousin’s hand as soon as they had left the room; but he could say no more, for the first time since his coming into the house he broke down and wept. For some minutes he could not speak, and Gerty wept with him. At

length he found his voice again. "God bless you, Gerty!" he recommenced, controlling his feelings with a strong effort. "You heard what he said. To talk of gratitude is absurd at such a moment as this. I can never repay you; Lucy, when she recovers, must learn to love you as a sister and her dearest friend, and perhaps she may find some way in which we may be able to show our gratitude. I can only pray that the good God may bless you"—and once more his voice faltered; the choking sensation came on again, he broke down, and the strong man laid his head upon the bed and wept like a child, but silently. When he looked up again, Gertrude Sinclair had left the room, and Lucy was looking at him, and the febrile glare of delirium had departed from her eyes.

Time had been when to merit and receive Reginald A'Bear's praise had been one of the chief objects of Gertrude Sinclair's life; and, though those days had passed away for ever, his words of deep and heartfelt gratitude,

awakening as they did old memories that could never be forgotten, had made every hidden chord of her inmost soul to vibrate, and caused her to tremble as an aspen leaf with a strange mingling of sensations. When her cousin laid his head upon the bed, as she had no desire that he should be a witness of her excessive agitation, she quietly left the room, and in the solitude of her own room by degrees regained composure.

Poor Gerty! She had found that her cousin's words of grateful praise had the same power over her as formerly, that she loved him still as deeply as ever, and hoped that it was not wrong. She did not think it was. It was impossible, for she had vainly tried during the past two years to attempt to forget that hour when he had saved her life at the risk of his own, and how he had looked as "Sultan" reared against him at the very brink of that awful precipice; but she had no desire that things should be any different to what they were. By degrees she grew

calm and quiet, more like her own self again ; and as there came to her the answer of a good conscience, of a pure and truthful, loving heart which had enabled her in the midst of trials to struggle hard to do her duty, she found that even in this world self-sacrifice has its rewards. When she left her own apartment, and sought Mrs. Adams to assist her in dressing, or took an active share during the rest of the day in the duties of the sick room, no one would have guessed the severe struggle which she had just been through. Before she returned to Burrscombe, a few weeks later, between Lucy and her nurse there had sprung up the deepest and sincerest sisterly affection, and often as the invalid began to grow stronger did she ponder in her mind, and try to think upon some plan by which she might show her gratitude ; but it seemed quite impossible, she could only pray with Reginald that God might bless her.

The knowledge that Lucy was sensible and looking at him brought Reginald A'Bear in a

moment to his senses again. "Avoid the least excitement," had been an injunction of the physicians more than once repeated, and in a moment he was calmness itself. She looked as though she wished to say something; he came nearer, and heard his own name "Reggie" faintly whispered; and then she closed her eyes again, the effort to keep them open seemed even too much for her feeble strength; but still her lips moved, and he bent his head still lower, and in a yet fainter whisper, which gradually died away, he just managed to make out his own name again and again repeated, as though Lucy were trying to recall something to her mind. It was thus that she fell into a quiet and placid slumber, but the look of pain had departed from her countenance, and a smile was in its place. He sat down and watched, glad that he was alone, and never took his eyes from off her until Mrs. Adams and his cousin entered the room; they at once noticed the change, and the house of mourning was

turned into a house of happiness as they rejoiced together.

Before Christmas the winter had been very severe, but as soon as that festive season had arrived, the frost and snow disappeared, and the weather completely changed ; so it had continued ever since, which was all in favour of Lucy's recovery, for as the old proverb says, " If the ice will bear a goose before Christmas, it will never bear a duck after." There was still, however, some grave symptoms in the case which gave the medical men much anxiety, but which, in the hope of their eventually passing away, they did not mention to her friends. By degrees, though very slowly and almost imperceptibly at first, she began to amend, to sit up ; then to be moved to a couch before the fire ; to be carried to her mother's room in her lover's arms ; then to pay a visit downstairs ; at length to make a few faltering, hesitating steps like a little infant just commencing to feel its feet, to learn to stand alone ; and as

soon as she was able to breathe the fresh air, though but the London atmosphere of Hyde Park, her recovery was much more rapid. As soon as it was practicable, and the physicians had given permission, after staying for a few days at Bearcroft on the way, they journeyed on to South Devon, Gertrude Sinclair having gone down about a fortnight previously to get everything ready for their reception at Burrscombe. It was there that Lucy Adams passed her twentieth birthday, which was to have been the witness of a very different scene, for it was upon that day that Reginald had hoped to have claimed her as his bride; the event, however, had now to be postponed for another year at least.

What recked Reginald A'Bear of that; after his Lucy's merciful deliverance from the jaws of death, out of the very clutches of the destroying angel, her lover, though he knew that her constitution had received a most severe shock, considered that it would have been almost a sin to have looked for

anything except complete recovery ; and doubly dear as she was now to him, expected nothing eventually but the most perfect convalescence ; while little Lux thought that it was almost worth while to have been ill to have so many loving hearts and hands around her, ready to anticipate every thought and wish.

* * * * *

The summer gradually passed away, but the heiress of Bearcroft still continued more or less of the invalid. The season had been very hot, and her mother and friends hoped that this might be the main cause of her excessive lassitude, and that during the coming winter, she might be able to shake off all remains of weakness, and be bright and active little Lux once more.

The piano was seldom heard during that summer except when Reginald A'Bear played or sung to her, and she spent most of her time lying on the sofa, or sitting under the shade of the trees upon the lawn. She had

attempted to ride "Prince" once or twice, but after a few attempts had given it up, and had taken to a basket carriage in which, drawn by a pair of Dartmoor ponies, she was driven by Reginald or her mother.

Towards the end of August the old medical man from the neighbouring town, who had attended Lucy for nearly twenty years, and therefore knew all the ins and outs of her constitution, called one day at the rectory on his way from Bearcroft. He was a very old friend, indeed Reginald A'Bear's very oldest friend, having brought him into the world some seven or eight and twenty years before, and was one of those who had rejoiced most heartily at his engagement to the young heiress.

"Come in, doctor, never mind ringing," shouted the young rector from the library, as he noticed who was the occupant of the carriage, which had driven up to his door. "I suppose you have come from Bearcroft; what news of the young lady this morning?"

Now the old doctor was one of the most conscientious of practitioners; not quite up to the discoveries made in his profession since he was a young man, but perfectly aware of the extent of his own knowledge, and never attempted by the use of long words and a persuasive manner, to pretend to a skill which he knew that he did not possess; and whenever he found that any case was growing out of the range of his knowledge, at once suggested that further advice should be called in. As soon as he had come in and taken a seat, he replied to his questioner—

“ Much the same as usual. She does not pick up her strength though quite so quickly as I could wish; and I thought that I would look in upon you on my way home, and say that it would be more satisfactory to me, if you would all just take a trip to London, and see the physicians who attended upon her during her illness in the winter. I think it is only what you ought to do under any

circumstances, for the satisfaction of all parties, as they are really the responsible persons in the case."

"Why, you don't think there is anything seriously the matter with her now?" asked the anxious lover in an alarmed voice.

"No, I do not say that; but you know that I have attended on Miss Adams now for a long time; indeed she has been as good as a life annuity to me for the last twenty years. When she was thirteen she had very severe attack of measles, and there has been a certain amount of delicacy in the chest ever since; so that immediately I heard of the nature of the disease she was suffering from, I was afraid of complications in that direction, which, as you know, took place. I should suggest, by way of precaution merely, a warmer climate for the winter; but would rather you should have other advice on the matter also. Should it tally with mine, the sooner you start the better, as we

often have some very cold weather at the end of September."

The next day, after talking the matter over with Mrs. Adams, a move to London was determined on, and the commencement of September saw them located once again in the metropolis; and as the physicians gave the same advice as their medical man at Bearcroft, there was nothing left but to act upon it. Reginald A'Bear had waited downstairs during the consultation, nervously apprehensive as to what might be the result of their examination. He met them at the foot of the stairs, and when they had entered the dining room and the door was closed, anxiously inquired what decision they had arrived at as the result of their examination; but, as he asked the question, seemed to be able to read the answer in the grave expression of their countenances.

"We have advised Mrs. Adams to spend the winter in the south of France," the senior physician answered.

"I expected that such would be your advice," he replied immediately, "and should like to know what reasons have made you come to this decision. It is folly to attempt to build oneself up with hope, when perhaps there is no foundation for it to rest upon. I would far sooner know the worst at once, for then I shall be better prepared for what may happen," and he stood awaiting their answer like a marble statue clothed in the garments of a man.

"We do not say that there is no hope," declared the physician; "but as you wish us to speak candidly, and perhaps it is better that we should, although there is no necessity for you to mention it either to Miss Adams or her mother, we must tell you that we noticed grave symptoms before she left London in the spring; we are sorry to say that in our examination to-day, we find that they have not abated, but have rather increased. Still we must all hope for the best."

"And be prepared for the worst," he interposed, addressing the words to himself, rather than to them.

"Yes, you must be prepared for the worst. You have asked for the truth, and we have told it to you. Miss Adams may live for some years to come, but she can never be a strong woman again."

Reginald A'Bear had heard the words, but for the time was like a prisoner in the dock, who is being led back to the condemned cell after the verdict has been pronounced, almost unconscious of what is taking place around him, of everything indeed except the dread sentence which has fallen upon his ears. He heeded not the kind words which followed, but mechanically shook hands with them, opened the door, and then came back, and standing before the fire, buried his face in his hands.

He had not dared to ask for further information, or to inquire the nature of the symptoms which had so alarmed them; but

he understood what they were only too well, and he, who had often prided himself upon his sanguine temperament, felt that there was no hope. For the second time in his short life he knew that the anticipated happiness of many years had been dashed in a moment to the ground. It was a bitter, bitter trial—a hard and crushing blow. Very different, however, were the nature of the feelings in his heart now, to what they had been at that time when he had found Lorna Maitland's and O'Connor's letters lying on the table in his rooms at Oxford.

Then, though God had permitted it, man was the instrument which had wrought the evil to him; but now he felt that it was the hand of the Almighty which was placing the cross upon his shoulders, and there were no fierce angry passions stirring in his heart, only sorrow, hopeless, tearless grief; but so heavy was the weight of that hand, that, for a time, as he stood thus before the fire, his heart had almost ceased to beat, and as a

lump of lead, seemed to sink down lower and lower within him.

He dared not go upstairs immediately, and when he had partially recovered himself, left the house, and turned his steps in the direction of Hyde Park. The old sweeper at the corner, who was generally accustomed to receive a trifle at his hands, came forward; but when he saw the heart-broken expression on his countenance as he passed without any sign of recognition, drew back again, while his request for alms, died away upon his lips. He came into collision with a hurrying passer by, but the hasty oath remained unspoken, for as the man noted the look of hopeless grief upon his countenance, he drew on one side, made way for him to pass, and begged pardon for his own awkwardness. At length he reached a seat on the North side of Rotten Row, and there he sat down. It seemed to him as though he had been one whose lot had been nought but sorrow and suffering from his earliest youth, and that he

had arrived at last at the very dregs of the cup; and with David, he exclaimed, "All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me;" but by degrees, better and holier feelings prevailed, as he thought how the royal Psalmist, in that very Psalm, had twice repeated the exhortation—"Hope thou in God." As he walked back to the house, it was with the resolution that come what might, he would never lose confidence in his Heavenly Father's care and love; and the crossing sweeper no longer hesitated to ask for the usual gratuity, which he received. That same evening, as he discussed with Lucy and her mother their coming journey to San Remo, they little suspected the thoughts which were locked up in the recesses of his heart.

CHAPTER IX.

THE physician's apprehensions, and her lover's forebodings, proved, alas, only too true. Lucy Adams never rallied, she daily grew worse, instead of better; that fell disease, which nought can stop, had taken hold upon her, and at first slowly, and then more rapidly, as month too quickly followed month, she became weaker and weaker; so that when they were returning to England, at her own request, in the following May, the heiress of Bearcroft knew that she was returning home to die.

With all her lover's care, Reginald had not been able to conceal from her his apprehensions. Little Lux had more than once raised her head in their villa at San Remo,

and had caught his sad and sorrowful eyes fixed upon her, with an expression of anxious and tender solicitude ; and though he had at once spoken in the most cheery and hopeful manner, her ears, accustomed to observe every change and variation in his voice, noticed at once its constrained tone, as though his words and thoughts were not in harmony. She felt, too, as month succeeded to month, that she was losing ground instead of gaining it ; and one morning, after the physician, who came now to the house daily, had left, when she and Reginald were alone together, she had asked him to tell her the truth. Though each word he spoke was as a dagger thrust into his own heart, he dared not hide it, and told her as calmly and gently as he could, that, as far as this world was concerned, in a few short months they would have to part for ever ; and, as he spoke, felt like a man who saw the dreaded knife suspended over his head, and had himself been forced to draw the fatal bolt.

"Oh, Reggie," she had cried in fear and sorrow, "we must not part—I cannot leave you—I am not fit to die"—and he had gone to her, and as she had flung her arms around his neck, and clung convulsively to him, as though to prevent herself being torn out of his grasp, crying piteously the while, again and again, in much about the same words, declaring that she could not leave him; kneeling by her side, he had prayed for her, and tried to give to her of his own faith, and teach her to hope in God. Gradually she found that peace which man has not in his power to bestow; so that when she arrived at Bearcroft, though it seemed hard, very hard, to give it all up, to leave her mother and Reggie just at the very threshold, too, of so much anticipated earthly happiness, the fear of death was gone, and hope had taken its place, while instead of murmur and complaint, there was patience and submission. At last she came even to rejoice at what was before her. Reggie she loved as truly and

deeply as ever, but it was with sanctified and chastened feelings ; her love became of that description, which we may suppose the ministering spirits cherish for those whom they are appointed to serve. She feared no longer the Messenger of Death, and was willing to take his hand, and tread with him the dark valley ; her chief sorrow now was caused by the thought that she would have to leave Reginald behind to struggle on, and bear the burden of life alone. Even this trouble was at length removed ; and then, there was nothing left to hinder her from looking forward, forward into that unknown future, which once had appeared so gloomy, dark and terrible, but which as it grew hourly nearer and nearer seemed to lose its dread appearance. As her weariness and sufferings increased, and her faith strengthened at the same time, though she would still at times have wished to live, she more often longed for that moment to come when there should be no more pain ; when the pre-

sent should have merged into the past. Lucy, indeed, was never more truly little Lux than during the last few days of her life, when she who once had needed comfort had herself become the comforter.

Among those who during those last few weeks watched and tended her with all a woman's care and sympathy, was unselfish Gertrude Sinclair; for as Mrs. A'Bear had at length, after a life prolonged many years beyond the usual age of man, breathed her last during her grandson's stay at San Remo, Gerty had once again come to nurse and watch over Lucy Adams, and try to give her cousin that consolation which he so much needed.

Reginald A'Bear found that it was easy enough to preach resignation, and theorize about it in the pulpit, but that the practice of it was something very different. To have to give up the property, which he had begun to consider as his own again, would have been in itself a hard trial, and he owned to

himself that such was the case ; but what it would be to give up his Lucy, whom he had learnt to love so truly and so well, and seemed to love more and more as each precious day fled by so quickly, was something more than he could realize. He said “ Thy will be done,” but did not mean it.

One day, shortly after their arrival at Bearcroft, no one being in the drawing room, Lucy had gone to the piano, and playing over one of her old favourite songs, had tried to sing the words ; but the sound of her feeble voice, so different to the rich full notes of two short years ago, and the various happy memories which the melody recalled, moved her so deeply, that her voice faltered, she could not go on, the feeble sounds ceased, a tear trickled down her cheek, and fell upon the ivory notes of the instrument, she gently closed the piano, and never opened it again—one more strand of the silver cord was severed. There was another upon whose ears the sound of those well known chords

had fallen, and awakened like reminiscences, for her lover had witnessed the affecting scene through the window. It was more than he could bear, and, hastily leaving the spot, he hurried through the woods, and in a secluded dell in the thick pine grove, threw himself upon the ground in an agony of sorrow. However good it may be for us, no chastening at the present moment seemeth to be joyous; and Reginald A'Bear, as he lay upon the ground, 'mid the solemn stillness of the dark pine grove, broken only by the murmuring of the breeze among its branches, and the music of the rippling stream in the valley below, felt that it was very grievous to see her daily breaking away from him, hourly wasting, and to be powerless to stop the rapid inroads of decay and suffering, and to be unable to alleviate it. After a time the paroxysm of grief passed, and he was once more calm again. That hour, however, had one good effect, it anticipated the bitterness of the coming separation; it took away for

him, from the hour of his Lucy's death, some portion of its pain ; it told him that the prevenient shadow of that hastening event, was already cast over him, and so helped to prepare him for its nearer approach.

As he was returning he stood for a few minutes and watched the slow revolutions of a water wheel belonging to an old flour mill in the valley below where he had been lying. The stream was small and the overshot wheel was large, and there was something solemn in its slow, regular, and unvarying motion. All the other rivulets in the country side might become dried up, but this one in that deep valley was ever flowing, cold, clear, and unchangeable. Reginald was no fatalist, but it looked to him like the remorseless wheel moved by Time's unchanging stream which nothing can stop ; which, amid all the changes taking place around, unmoved, untouched, continues the same unvaried pace ; while each bucket full of water was as a moment or a day, which, after performing its

allotted functions, gives way to its as short-lived successor, and so on and on unceasingly. The summer air was filled with May-flies rising and falling in the sunbeam, enjoying to the full their brief ephemeral existence ; and one of them had fallen into the stream and was vainly trying to rise again from the unsympathizing bosom of the relentless current. Reginald watched it floating down that stream of death ; he saw it caught in a bucket of the revolving wheel ; sink down lower and lower, still struggling helplessly with its approaching fate ; until it was lost to sight, buried in the dark and seething waters below. As he walked away there was sorrow in his heart for the fate of the hapless insect whose few short hours of existence had thus been shortened—it bore so vivid a resemblance to the history of his betrothed ; he knew that in a few short weeks, perhaps even days, she would also be hidden from his sight.

And how was it that the last trouble of little Lux had been removed ? She would

never allow her kind and constant nurses to be always with her, but made them go for a walk or a ride in the fresh air every day ; and one morning, just about a week before her death, when Reginald and his cousin were walking in the park, she said to her mother, “ I had such a strange dream last night.”

“ What was it, my love ? ” asked Mrs. Adams, coming over and sitting down by the side of the couch on which her daughter was lying.

“ I thought that I was turned into a ministering spirit,” she replied, “ and came down among you all again, and was appointed to watch over you as a guardian angel, but though I was hovering about so near none of you seemed to know that I was there ; and I have been thinking whether it will ever come true, whether, after we are dead, we shall know what is taking place in the world. I remember old Nanny used often to say that she had no doubt of it, that she often felt as though

her father and mother were quite near to her.
What do you think?"

"I am sure I do not know," her mother answered. "I have never considered the matter."

"I think I shall," she rejoined decidedly; "I feel that though none of you will know it I shall often be very near to you. I want to speak to you about something else, too," she continued in a somewhat altered tone of voice, which her mother at once perceived, and wondered what was coming; "and then I shall have nothing more to think about in this world."

She paused a moment, while Mrs. Adams observed that her lips were moving, and then began again, "You know how good and kind Gerty has been to me; how she came and nursed me when I was first taken ill, and the doctors in London said that it was all through her nursing and Reggie's that I lived. I can never really repay her, for I was not fit to

die then; but now it is different, I think I am ready at last."

She stopped again, and Mrs. Adams thinking that she might be tired, advised her to put off the remainder of the communication until another time. "No, mamma," she answered, "I must tell you now, another day may be too late. Reggie and I in days gone by have often talked about how we could reward her, but we could never think of anything. It seemed quite impossible; but I have thought of a way during the last week."

Once more she paused. Her mother did not interrupt her this time, curious to know what that way might be; while—like a traveller resting for a moment on the brow of a hill before descending into the valley, who turns with a lingering of regret to look back once more upon the beautiful landscape through which he has been so lately journeying—little Lux, during that moment's pause, gazed once more upon those pleasant scenes

in which she had taken part, those happy days which she had spent on earth, and which she had so lately hoped might even have been yet more happy; and then, though a tear was glistening in her eye, went on again. "Gerty and I," she recommenced, "have often talked about Reggie since we came home; I am sure that she loves him very much, and that she once must have loved him in the same way as I do—and after I am gone—not quite directly, but after some little time—I want you"—and as she spoke partly raised from off the bed her thin transparent hand on which was still glittering her lover's birthday present—"I want you to give her this ring, and say that Lucy wished it. She will make him a good wife, and he will learn to love her in time, and you will be all happy once again. She promised me the other day to try and comfort Reggie when I am gone, and to be a daughter to you, and Reggie will always be like a son. I don't think he will ever quite forget me. I should not like any one to be his wife, but

Gerty will be different. Promise me, mother," she said again, earnestly, slightly rising from the couch.

Mrs. Adams promised; and, as she sealed her promise with a kiss, noticed that the tear had disappeared, and in its stead a calm and holy, peaceful smile was playing about her daughter's lips.

Another and a thicker strand of the silver cord was loosened; and there was little now to prevent the soul of Lucy Adams from soaring upwards to the source from whence it had come down.

On the same day of the following week, Mrs Adams and Gerty having left them for a short walk, Reginald A'Bear was sitting by the couch of the invalid in the same chair which had been occupied by her mother on the previous occasion. Lucy had been rapidly sinking during the past week, and none of them now were absent from her very long; she was still able to leave her bed for a few hours during the day, but Reginald, as he took

his seat by her side that morning, thought that a great change had taken place since he had seen her lying there on the previous day. The smile which had never left her face, except during a few moments of pain, since that conversation with her mother, was still upon her countenance; and as her lover sat and watched, it seemed to him that no saint in Paradise nor angel in Heaven could have looked more calm and peaceful, than there was something unearthly in her look; as though, for Mrs Adams had told him of the dream, the transformation had already commenced. That last act of pure and unselfish love, which as yet he knew not of, had indeed purged the dross from out the gold, and as Reginald looked he felt that it would have been selfishness indeed to have wished to have kept her from that happiness, now so near.

The fatigue even of partially dressing had greatly wearied her; at last she raised her eyelids apparently with a great effort; their

eyes met, and there was in hers that almost indescribable look of peace and happiness, never to be seen except in the eyes of the dying, and not always then; a look which seems to say that they have had revealed to them a vision of that which has been promised to "the pure in heart," as though the mortal had already commenced to put on immortality. Mingled with these higher feelings, he noticed also a yearning expression of the utmost tenderness, which told him that his image was still imprinted upon her heart. Love, joy, peace, patience, hope, gratitude, were all shown forth there; he knew that he would carry the remembrance of it impressed upon his memory until he trusted it might be seen upon his own face also. He felt that the end must now be very near, and wished that Mrs. Adams and Gerty might soon return; but dared not leave her side. He fancied that she wished to speak to him, and kneeling down, took her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"Reggie," she whispered, but her voice

was so faint that he could hardly catch the words, "I feel that I should like to breathe the fresh air once more. I should like to sit at the window, and look across the park again."

It might be unwise, but her most simple wish was law ; he wrapt her carefully in the eider-down quilt and blankets with which she was surrounded ; and then lifting her thin and fragile form in his arms carried her, with her head resting on his shoulder, into the boudoir, where they had first pledged their troth to one another just two short years before, and sat down in front of the open window.

It was a close and sultry, hazy day, with hardly a cloud to be seen, except on the distant horizon, and the sun was shining through the haze with a yellow disagreeable glare, while the swallows were flying very low, just skimming the surface of the ground in their search for food. Reginald A'Bear, however, hardly noticed at the time these

warnings of a coming tempest ; Lucy, and Lucy only, was in his thoughts ; he seemed to have a presentiment that the end was come, and held her gently, but closer, to his heart.

She looked around the boudoir, her school room in infancy and childhood, the scene one way or other of many of the happiest moments of her life ; she gazed through the open window at the garden, now bright with summer flowers, from whence there was rising the sweet scent of many blossoms, and the warbling music of many happy songsters ; at "Prince" and "Tchernaya" grazing side by side just below the window where they were sitting—it was all play and no work with them now ; at each familiar spot in the park, the fields, and still more distant woods ; at the road leading to the old colonel's monument, along which she had so often ridden, a joyous, merry girl, full of life and spirits. They neither spoke, but while thus gazing around she held his hand feebly pressed

between her own. She then closed her eyes once more, and was so very still that Reginald began to ask himself if they would ever open again.

The end was very, very near, but it was not yet. He bent down and kissed her; she opened her eyes once more, it was for the last time now; even in those few moments there seemed to be more of Heaven, and less of earth, in her look.

A slight breeze had arisen, and blew a sprig of the creeping red rose across the open window. Even at that moment, when the soul was almost hovering between earth and heaven, the sight of that rose awakened recollections; she gazed at it for a moment, and then turned on her lover once more, the same look of yearning, tender love, strong even in death. Christianity does not make us stoics, it does not exalt indifference as one of the highest virtues; on the contrary, it intensifies the tenderest feelings of our nature, it honours tears, it deepens, though

it sanctifies, our anguish—and who shall dare to say that if little Lux could then have chosen, and should have wished to live, that she would have done wrong ?

Reginald reached forward, and plucked from the waving bough the only flower within his grasp ; it was full blown, but still beautiful, and he placed it between her hands. One lingering look she gave it, and then never took her eyes from his until they were closed for ever ; and slowly, but too surely, the mists of death, the shadows of the coming separation fell upon them ; and though she yet lived, all things of earth by degrees vanished from her gaze.

“ It is growing very dark,” she whispered—“ cold, so cold”—and the smile for a moment left her countenance, as a slight shudder, as if of fear, passed through her feeble form.

He knew the end had come, and clasped her nearer to his heart ; if she must die, she had best die thus.

In a little while the smile of joy and peace

returned again ; more holy and beautiful than ever. He bent his head lower, yet lower ; and again and again, fainter and fainter, until sound died away, though the lips still moved, he heard her say—

“ All is bright—all is bright.”

Yes, all was bright ! The darkness had for ever passed ; and soon the golden bowl was fractured. The pitcher was broken at the fountain, and the stream of human life ebbed silently away ; the wheel at the cistern was shattered, and the bucket, lately full of clear and limpid sparkling water, fell back empty into the well again ; the silver cord was loosed, and its last strand severed ; and the soul of little Lux, as a lark released from the snare of the fowler, rose higher and higher, and yet higher above the earth, moving towards that place where there shall be no vicissitudes of day and night, cold and heat, sunshine and darkness, but where light unchangeable, unvarying, shall be its everlasting portion.

The exact moment of the soul's departure Reginald did not perceive. After a time he found her growing heavier in his arms, and knew that all was over, and prepared to carry her back to her own room again. As he moved, the red rose fell to pieces, and the leaves were scattered over her dress and the quilt in which she was wrapped; he did not brush them away, but just as she was bore her in his arms, and placed her gently upon the bed; and then stood and watched by her side, waiting for the return of Mrs. Adams and his cousin, and thought that she looked like an elder sister of Chantry's "Sleeping children," while he watched her sleeping, as some French writers call it, "*le sommeil des élus.*"

He felt no inclination to weep at present, hardly to mourn; in such a death there was nothing gloomy, nothing terrible. "Can this be passing through the dark valley?" he thought, and though he knew too well that she was gone, almost expected to see her open

her eyes and gaze at him once more ; and then he turned his thoughts upon himself, and became lost in meditation, as he communed with himself, and asked, " What next ? "

While he was standing thus absorbed in thought, Emma Burgess, on her way to the servant's hall, knocked at the door to ask if she could do anything for her young mistress before going down. Reginald A'Bear heard her not, so she softly opened the door and advanced a step or two into the room ; still he heeded her not, and she instinctively understanding at the first glance what had taken place, as softly, but more hastily than she had entered, left the room again, hurried along the passage, rushed down the stairs into the servant's hall, where the rest of the domestics were assembled for dinner, and flinging herself into a chair, burst into a flood of hysterical crying.

" What ever his the matter, Hemma ? " asked Mr. Whitehouse, rising from his seat at the end of the table, while the other

servants looked from one to the other in alarm.

She could only answer at first with sobs ; but at length managed to exclaim—

“ It’s all over, and Mr. A’Bear is standing by the bed like a statue ! ” and then went on crying harder than ever.

Mr. Whitehouse strove hard but vainly to rise to the occasion, to make some observation on human affairs which might give to those present a fit notion of his superior wisdom ; but it was useless, nature asserted itself—the butler was merged in the man, as he broke down and kept her company.

The fat cook, at the opposite end of the table, who had been engaged in carving when Emma Burgess had entered the room, deposited the fork in the dish again, buried her face in her apron, clasped within her great fat hands, and wept in unison. The super-respectable housemaids, with their handkerchiefs to their eyes, retired to their own apartment, and took strong doses of salvolatile which they

had prepared in readiness for the occasion ; the kitchenmaid, after trying to eat a few more mouthfuls, went into the back kitchen and wept at intervals during the rest of the day, and finally sobbed herself to sleep, and was sent to bed at an early hour by the cook, partly out of compassion, and partly from fear that she should not be up in time in the morning ; Joe, once the buttons, but now grown out of them, forgot that he had never been helped, and went without his dinner ; while John Sweetbread sought the stable, and taking an extra feed of oats, went into the Park and told his dumb friends, "Prince" and "Tchernaya" the sorrow which oppressed his heart, and the loss they had all sustained, and as he walked away again, felt very much the better for their evident friendship and apparent sympathy.

There were many more tears shed below than above stairs that afternoon.

That same evening, the storm which had been brewing all the day, at length reached

them, and raged horribly more or less during the succeeding night. When the smiling morn rose again, the men on their road to work saw that the wind had made for itself a passage through the old avenue, which was rendered impassable for a time by the trunks of the fallen trees, many of which were lying mingled together, having apparently helped to knock one another over like so many ninepins. There was, however, a yet more remarkable reminiscence of the storm a few hundred yards away. In the middle of the park grew an old oak, commonly called by the country folk, "Th' A'Bear wak," about two-and-twenty feet in girth—the sylvan monarch of the neighbourhood; from the bark of which, in days gone by, the village maidens concocted love philtres, and maybe did so still.

It was of the old British sort, low, massive, and spreading; its age it was impossible to guess, but doubtless had presented much about the same appearance for centuries; at

about twelve feet from the ground it swelled out majestically into nine huge boughs, which still gave signs of the greenest and most vigorous old age, and either of which was equal in size to the trunks of the ordinary trees around ; there had evidently once been a tenth, and “ Wold Zammel” was accustomed, to say that his grandfather had told him that it had broken off when he was a boy ; for, instead of springing up more perpendicularly, like the rest of its brothers and sisters, it had spread along horizontally, at no great distance from the ground, and had broken off at last, oppressed by its own weight, its fall being doubtless hastened by the habit which grandfather Woolcote and his brother urchins had adopted of turning it into a swing. In the gap caused by the loss of this bough, had sprung up, curiously enough, a beech tree, the mast having been dropped accidentally by some passing “ ood-coostie,” or frightened squirrel, which had gradually pierced its way through the outer branches of the oak, until

it reared its graceful head above the sturdier limbs of the ancient tree ; while, as though to protect its more fragile companion, from where the bough had broken off, a fresh arm had grown, which held as in a loving embrace the trunk of the younger tree. In days gone by, Reginald had often stood, with Lucy by his side, beneath their shadow, and had drawn the very obvious analogy suggested by their own history, when compared with that of the trees under which they were standing.

In Colonel A'Bear's time, the old steward, who was not altogether free from the superstitions of the neighbourhood, had often tried to persuade his master to allow him to cut down the beech ; but the colonel had only laughed, saying, "No, they have grown together so long, it would be a pity to separate them now ; besides, we can't afford to lose one of the few curiosities of the country side."

The terrible storm, however, which arose on the night which succeeded the day on which Lucy Adams died, brought about the separation which the old steward had desired

many years before. As the men were on their way to work, they noticed that the beautiful beech, wrenched from the side of the oak, had been torn up by the roots, and with its fair branches broken in pieces, was lying on the ground, but that "th' A'Bear wak" still stood the same as ever. Only the bough which had encircled the trunk of the beech had been torn off by the falling tree, while some of the smaller branches were lying on the ground, and others, partly broken through, were drooping and weeping as if in sorrow over their companion thus suddenly and cruelly overwhelmed with disaster.

What the old wives said on the occasion must be imagined. Reginald A'Bear, a few days later, stood and contemplated the strange scene of havoc and confusion. The sight moved him greatly; de Mervaille's motto suggested itself to his mind, and as he walked away with a sigh he muttered almost involuntarily to himself, "*Ce qu'il ne faille pas être, ne pourra pas.*"

CHAPTER X.

IN the middle of the following week the funeral took place, which, according to Lucy's own wish, as expressed shortly before her death, was of the simplest character. No long line of carriages, some sent out of respect for the dead, but with no one inside, a truly significant mark of the emptiness and unreality of the whole affair. No bustling undertaker, going about with a business-like air; his great ambition being apparently to see that every one present is decorated with a scarf and hat-band, and possessed of a pair of Dent's best black kids at 4s. 2d. a pair. No grand hearse with waving plumes, surrounded by mutes, paid to mourn át so much an hour, mocking by the hypocritical length

of their faces, and their sanctimonious demeanour, the reality of the grief of those who truly mourn.

No! like the blind girl of Castell Cuillé—

“ Decked with flowers a single hearse
To the church yard forth they bear.
Village girls in robes of snow,
Follow weeping as they go.”

And theirs was no feigned sorrow, no pretended grief, for the young heiress of Bearcroft, during her short life, had endeared herself to all those with whom she had been brought into contact. With the single exception of Emma Burgess, the chief mourner on the occasion as far as outward manifestation of inward grief were concerned, was Mr. Gruggen. He had never been married, and had always lived more or less a solitary life, having left home to make his way in the world at an early age; and Lucy Adams, while yet a little child, had twined herself round the old lawyer’s heart, and he loved her as though she had been his own daughter. From the day on which he had heard that

the illness of his little Lux was unto death, he was never seen by his clerks to rub his hands again; sometimes they mechanically crossed one another, but the motive cause was wanting, he shook his head at them, and they were soon hanging listlessly by his side once more. He adopted another habit, however, quickly noticed by the observant clerks, being often seen by them sitting on the high stool in his office, apparently lost in thought, with his eyes fixed on those boxes on which were written conspicuously in the boldest characters, “Mr. Matthew Adams.”

What it all betokened, they could not imagine; but mysterious communications passed between them, and looking towards their employer they pointed to their foreheads and shook their heads; evidently they considered that *his* was going.

“A bee in his bonnet,” said a youngster who hailed from Scotland; “something the matter with the upper story,” remarked

another ; "lost one of his buttons during the last week," suggested a third who came from Somersetshire ; while it was the generally received opinion that there was a screw loose somewhere.

But they were all wrong, the old man for his age was clear-headed as ever ; he was only lost occasionally in thought as he mused over his own well intentioned plans which had come to nothing ; as he carried his mind back to some of the conversations which he had held with Matthew Adams shortly before the old merchant's death ; or as he grieved over the untimely and hastening fate of little Lux, and then his tears would begin to flow, for Lucy Adams was very dear to him, and the management of her property had grown to be a labour of love. Mr. Gruggen had evidently much to think about as well as to sorrow over.

What was the nature of those thoughts was revealed on the day following the funeral, when, at his particular request, a small

number of people were assembled in the library at Bearcroft, in order to witness the opening of the oblong oaken box, which carefully screwed down and sealed, had been given into his daughter-in-law's charge by Matthew Adams so many years before.

The persons assembled to witness the opening, were Mrs. Adams, the now childless widow, Gertrude Sinclair, Mr. Maitland, who had performed the funeral and his wife, Reginald A'Bear, and Mr. Gruggen, before whom was the mysterious box, and a parchment envelope carefully tied and sealed, which looked as though it would have just fitted into a box of the same shape and size. These were all seated in various attitudes round the room; Reginald A'Bear, with a calm, stern look upon his countenance, very much the same as that which had been upon his father's when some twenty years before he had led his little son into that same room to have that never forgotten conversation with his grandfather, and it seemed to him

now as though he was about to be an actor on a somewhat similar occasion. Standing by the honest lawyer's side was the tall confidential clerk who had officiated for his employer at the sale of the A'Bear estates. When everything was in readiness, and all were in expectation, Mr. Gruggen nodded to the clerk, who at once, with an air of importance, cut the string, unfolded the paper and in the same solemn and unhurried manner proceeded to scrape off the sealing wax and unloosen the screws. At length the lid was taken off, and from the interior he produced a deed folded in a parchment envelope, carefully tied and sealed, the twin brother of that which Mr. Gruggen had brought with him, and was now lying on the table before them.

Stript of its technical language and legal phraseology, its contents were to the following effect. In the preamble the old merchant stated his reasons for wishing to keep his intentions secret with regard to the distribution

of his property in the case of his granddaughter's early death, viz., in order that it might give rise to no vain expectations in the mind of him whom he had named as his heir of destination, in the event of such a contingency happening. It then went on to say that as far as he knew, his granddaughter, Lucy Adams, was his only relative, and in case she should die unmarried before attaining the age of twenty-five, he left, after amply providing for Mrs. Adams, the whole of his property real and personal to Reginald A'Bear and his heirs, in token of his appreciation of the noble conduct of his father and grandfather in giving up their estates to the creditors of the Bristol Bank.

The communication, except of course to Mr. Gruggen, having been so totally unexpected by all, they could only look at one another for some time, with an expression of wonder on their countenances. Mrs. Maitland alone uttered an exclamation of surprise, the others remained as mute as

they had been before, dumbstruck with astonishment. The veil fell at once from Mrs. Adams's eyes, she understood now what had been Mr. Gruggen's motives in persuading her to offer the living of Bearcroft to Reginald A'Bear, and doing all that he could to further his marriage with her daughter.

As soon as the will had been read, and the old lawyer had remarked that the two documents were exactly alike, as he had written them with his own hand, he burst into tears and exclaimed, apparently in answer to his own thoughts, or what he considered might be in the mind of Mrs. Adams at the moment—

“I did it all for the best. I knew he would have wished it if he had been alive. But it was not to be. He often said it was a foolish bargain, and no good would ever come of it.”

“Do not grieve,” answered Mrs. Adams, through her own tears. “Do not grieve, dear Mr. Gruggen, I know you did it all for the

best. Your little Lux is happier far now, than she could ever have been on earth, and we must not wish her back; we must only think about trying to meet her again some day. Her grandfather, I know, never thought that she would live, and I shared his fears, which"—she was going to have said, "have proved only too true;" but the concluding words died away on her lips, as her attention and that of every one else in the room, was suddenly arrested by the altered appearance of Reginald A'Bear.

As soon as his own name, so unexpectedly uttered by the long clerk, had fallen upon the ears of the now heir of Bearcroft, he heard no more. With a great effort he had strung himself up to a pitch of apparent outer calmness; though he felt that the property without Lucy to enjoy it with him, would have been comparatively but of little worth, he yet could not contemplate entirely unmoved the thought that, now for a second time, when it had almost

seemed within his grasp, it was going to pass into the hands of strangers; and notwithstanding the shock of his recent bereavement, was naturally curious as to what would be the future fate of the home of his ancestors; the remotest possibility of the old merchant having named him as his heir of provision, had never for one moment suggested itself to his cogitations. Like a soldier, who, carefully prepared to receive a charge in front, is completely overthrown by a sudden and unexpected assault from the opposite quarter; so was it with Reginald A'Bear in this instance. His nerves were quite prepared to have received without flinching, the shock of the discovery as to what should become of those fair lands, which he had hoped to have enjoyed with Lucy as his loving wife, and had the communication been anything except what it was, not a muscle of his countenance would have moved; but as soon as his own name was mentioned, the defences having been all

made to face in the wrong direction, he was overcome, and his nerves gave way beneath the sudden and unexpected communication.

He heard not a word that was uttered afterwards by the long Scotch clerk, by Mr. Gruggen, or Mrs. Adams; for a few minutes he sat motionless, as if in a fit of catalepsy; and then, for the third time in his life, his face became as pale as death, his head swam round, as everything about him gradually became indistinct, then disappeared; his hands were clenched, his teeth firmly set; the perspiration stood in heavy drops upon his forehead, and he would have fallen to the ground had not Mr. Maitland sprang forward and caught him in his arms. On the two former occasions he had almost, on this, he altogether fainted away, much to the alarm of all those who were present.

It terminated, however, what might otherwise have been an embarrassing interview for all. Joe at once started by a short cut across the fields for the doctor, while Mr.

Whitehouse went in search of the groom ; but long before the old cob was ready the now owner of Bearcroft had revived, and when the medical man arrived, was lying on the sofa in the library, with Mrs. Adams by his side, who was holding one of his hands, while Gertrude Sinclair was applying cloths soaked in vinegar and water to his forehead ; but all alarming symptoms had already passed away.

That same evening, after Mr. Gruggen and Reginald had retired, for Mrs. Adams would not hear of his returning to the rectory that night ; the two ladies had a long and affecting interview, something of the same character as that between Ruth and Naomi ; except that there was no attempt on Mrs. Adams's part to try and induce Gertrude Sinclair to leave her. It ended in Gerty promising, whatever might be the issue of events, to make her home with Mrs. Adams, whom from that day forward she always addressed by the endearing epithet of "mother."

“ And then there is poor dear Reggie,” said Mrs. Adams, “ we must try and comfort him. The more I think over it the more it seems that the hand of God is in it all, though he has made use of us as his instruments. When he gets better, we must interest him in what is going on around, and if any one will prove a blessing to the neighbourhood, he will. My own dear unselfish child, said just this day fortnight, that she hoped, ‘ we should all be happy together some day,’ and we must try our best, and that she thought she would be our guardian angel, and come and watch over us.” But the bereaved mother could say no more, she broke down and wept, so that Gerty was enabled at once to commence a loving daughter’s duties, as she promised, again and again, to stay with her, and try to fill Lucy’s place, and make up in some degree for her loss; and Mrs. Adams felt that her comforter was like a ministering angel, strengthening her under the severest

trial possible for a widowed mother to endure, the loss of her only child. When she said that night, "Thy will be done," it was with more true and heartfelt resignation than it had been uttered since the day of her daughter's death; while full of gratitude, she asked in addition, that Lucy's wish might be granted, and that Gertrude Sinclair, even in this life, might be rewarded for her loving kindness to the childless widow.

By degrees the excess of grief wore away, and Reginald A'Bear accepted his position, and began like his father after the loss of his mother, to busy himself, with many improvements needed on the estates which had much increased in size under the fostering charge of Mr Gruggen. The improvements were in a somewhat different line to his father's. What little Lux and he had planned, during those first few months of almost uninterrupted happiness which had succeeded their engagement, was the mainspring which moved his will in the matter; though dead,

he determined that she should still live in them. Before the end of the year a long row of alms houses had commenced to appear above the ground in the centre of the village, while the church was surrounded with scaffolding and given up for a time into the hands of masons and carpenters. Mindful of the Chinese proverb that "the best way to keep the city clean is for every man to sweep before his own door," he had determined to commence at home, and by degrees to provide everything necessary for the religious instruction and education of the people on his estates.

A house called Bearleigh, the dower-house as it was called of the A'Bear's in former days had been settled upon Mrs. Adams by her father-in-law, but she needed little persuasion to induce her to alter her original intention and take up her abode at Bearcroft. Before twelve months, however, had elapsed the dower-house was inhabited by Mr. Gruggen, who having resigned his business into the

hands of younger men, had come down to pass the few remaining years of his life in the immediate neighbourhood of the only real friends that he had in the world.

Reginald A'Bear still continued rector of the parish, but offered the house ready furnished to the mother of his old friend Gerard Lisle, with the promise that if her son Arthur, who had just gone up to Oxford, should still continue in the same mind the living should eventually be his. And so month followed month. By the time the following midsummer had come round, though the memory of little Lux was still embalmed in the hearts of all at Bearcroft, the bitterness of the parting had passed away; even the mother had commenced to smile again, and Reginald A'Bear in some measure to take his place in the world around. The passage of little Lux through the world had been like that of a bright sunbeam which leaves nothing but pleasant memories behind, though after it has passed by everything for a time seems darker than ever. There was

an almost defaced epitaph on a crumbling moss-covered tomb in the old churchyard which had much struck the young rector shortly after entering on the duties of the living.

“ She ne'er knew joy but friendship might divide,
Or gave her parents' grief but when she died.”

And the same words he now felt might have also been placed on the grave of his “ blessed ” Lucy, as his German studies had taught him to speak of her.

What did the world say ? It said so many things that it would take a whole chapter or more to do full justice to its collective wisdom and wordiness on the occasion.

However, as far as the inhabitants of Bearcroft were concerned, it exercised sufficient discretion and good taste to keep its ideas to itself on the occasion. One individual, and one only, who, essentially narrow-minded, worldly, and destitute of all proper feeling himself, naturally supposed, according to the dictates of his own limited experience which

was strictly confined to his own miserable thoughts and feelings, that the mind of the possessor of Bearcroft was cast in the same mis-shapen mould as his own, ventured to congratulate him. He was instantly, however, answered with such a silent look of contempt, pity, and indignation that the gentle(?) man saw at once that he had made a mistake and humbly apologised, thinking at the same time that it was a precious queer thing for a man to get into such a rage because he had merely congratulated him on a piece of such uncommon good luck.

Did Gerty, meanwhile, never allow any of the thoughts of previous days and years to come into her mind as the months fled by? She was a woman, good, pure, and true; but a woman still, with a woman's heart, with a woman's feelings, deep, strong, and loving. According to her promises to Lucy, reiterated to Mrs. Adams, she was a loving daughter to the latter, and a sympathising sister to her cousin Reginald. If thoughts of what yet

might be in some future time, entered her mind at times, she kept them to herself. Had they been wrong she would have resisted them; but they were not wrong, and she allowed them.

CHAPTER XI.

A YEAR and three months had passed away since Reginald A'Bear had become the possessor of the inheritance of his forefathers, and the well-remembered day in September had come round again, on which exactly one-and-twenty years before he had been told by his grandfather that he must give up "Silvertail," and all that was at that time so dear to him at Bearcroft; and then, while the two ladies had sought the boudoir, he had retired to the library in order to continue a sermon, of which he had written the introduction on the previous evening. But seated in the very chair in which his grandfather had been sitting on that eventful morning when he had climbed upon his knee; that old oak chair, with so

many of the associations of the past around him ; Montagu Mapeley's Bible, Lucy's portrait, a letter from O'Connor received that morning, with pleasant and painful reminiscences of the many years which had flown by, crowding one after the other into his mind ; he found that it was impossible to continue writing on the topic which he had chosen the previous evening, and taking another quire of paper, commenced an altogether fresh discourse on "Memory."

Gerty and Mrs. Adams, when they reached the boudoir, after chatting for a short time, took their work, and as if by mutual consent, sat for some minutes in silence. Reginald's communication concerning the event of one-and-twenty years ago had made them both thoughtful. The elder lady, after those few minutes of silent meditation, put her work on to the table again, and left the room, but returned almost immediately afterwards, and when she had sat down, taken up the needle-work again, and made a few stitches, said—

"Gerty, dear, do you feel inclined for a serious conversation? I want to talk to you about something Lucy mentioned to me just before she died, and asked me some day to tell you."

They had often talked about the dear one gone during the year and three months which had elapsed since little Lux had for the last time looked out of the window at which her mother was now sitting, and as Gertrude Sinclair moved her chair nearer to Mrs. Adams's, she could not help wondering what it could be which had never been told her during the past fifteen months.

"You know," began Mrs. Adams, affectionately taking between her own, and pressing Gertrude's left hand, which happened to be nearest to her, "that Lucy often wished to find some plan to repay you for all your kindness to her, but could never think of any way until just before her death, and then a happy idea entered her mind. When once it had occurred to her, a great weight seemed

taken away ; she appeared to have no earthly thing left to trouble her, but was able to look straight forward into the future."

Gerty was sitting on a chair somewhat lower than Mrs. Adams's, and as she looked up into her face, wondered what was coming, and her wonder was not decreased when her adopted mother took a little parcel from her pocket, and put it into her hands with the remark—

"Lucy told me to give it you, and ask you to wear it for her sake." Nor when she had opened it did her marvel cease, to find within the well-known ring which she had so often seen sparkling on the thin, transparent hand of little Lux.

"Oh, mother!" she said, kissing her as she affectionately put her own arm through that of Mrs. Adams, "I shall, indeed, value it, but would you not rather wear it yourself? I know that Lucy used to value it more than anything she possessed," and when she had finished speaking, wondered why Mrs. Adams had made such a mystery of the

matter, and had not given it to her before.

“No, my dear Gertrude; my child wished you, and you only, to wear it.”

“But,” replied his cousin, faintly blushing, “perhaps Reggie might not like to see me wearing it; it would bring so many painful recollections to his mind.”

“You can tell him that it was at Lucy’s request, and that I put it on;” and she took it out of her hand, and before Gerty had time to offer any objection, or to resist, had slipped it over the fourth finger of her left hand.

“Oh, not on that finger,” replied she, blushing crimson, and quickly drawing it off again, “on any finger but that; think what Reginald would think, and what every one would say.”

Mrs. Adams picked the ring from off her lap again, and quietly withdrawing her arm from Gerty’s, put it round her neck, and having lovingly kissed her, thus gently tried to reason away her scruples—

"The week before my dear unselfish child was taken from me, she told me that she was certain that you must once have entertained for Reginald the same feelings as she did—if such is still the case, your own heart will tell you—and she made me promise to give you this ring, and say that it was her last and dying wish, that you should some day be his wife. As for me, you and Reginald are the two beings whom I now love better than any one else in the world, and my great wish from this moment, is to see you married and happy together. If there is that communion between the saints on earth, and those in Paradise, which Lucy believed in, you will make her happier than she is, if that be possible, by acceding to her request."

Gerty no longer resisted, but allowed the ring to be placed upon her finger. "And now," urged Mrs. Adams, affectionately kissing her again, "I have one more request to make of you, the last request that I am ever likely to ask you to grant me,

it is this : to go down at once to the library, and say to Reginald that I have just given you this ring, and put it on your finger, and ask him if you may keep it there, and say that it was the last and dying wish of his little Lux."

" Oh, mother ! " appealed Gerty, " anything but this ; I cannot go ; he would despise me for ever afterwards."

" Not so, Gertrude, dear " replied Mrs. Adams, tenderly, " he will see in it only another proof of your self-sacrificing spirit. Consider the matter calmly—you love him, and have loved him for years with a pure, self-denying, uncomplaining love, which it is not for me to praise ; it is now in your power to make him happy, and you will not hesitate."

" Anything, anything but this ! " she appealed again ; " but, mother, I cannot go ; indeed I cannot ; my limbs would fail me before I had gone half the way."

But the elder lady still perservered with her request. " You know Reginald as well,

and better perhaps, than I do ; you know the innate delicacy of his character, that if he ever thought of asking you to be his wife, the fear of hurting my feelings would restrain him. I fancy I have noticed"—Gerty had observed it also—"that he is growing a different man, in some respects, to what he was ; so much more stern, not exactly morose, but something like it. My love, I believe it is in your power, and in your power only, as his loving wife, to make him as you used to know him in days gone by. I know it is asking you to do a great deal, which all your natural modesty would recoil from ; but remember, he saved your life once, as you have often told me, at the risk of his own, and you cannot now surely hesitate when his happiness is at stake."

Mrs. Adams understood the much neglected, but valuable "art of putting things ;" she had touched the right chord at last, and urged by the remembrance of that hour when Reginald had stood at the edge of that fearful

cliff, with "Sultan" rearing madly in terror against him, Gertrude Sinclair hesitated no longer; she allowed Mrs. Adams to place the ring on her finger, and after a fond embrace, left the boudoir, and slowly proceeded downstairs to the library.

As may be supposed, she was in a state of the most intense nervous excitement; but as is often the case, its very intensity made her appear more outwardly calm and composed than usual. She found her cousin, having written as much as he was likely to finish that morning, with his back turned to the door, gazing through the open window.

"Ah, Gerty," he exclaimed, awakened out of his reverie, by the sound of the opening of the door; and, as he saw her pause a moment on the threshhold, said, having mistaken the cause of her hesitation, "You won't be disturbing me in the least, and if I shall not bore you, should like to read to you what I have just written on 'Memory;' it will only take a few minutes."

"I should like to hear it very much," she replied, closing the door, and coming over and standing by his side; and as he read, while watching his countenance her courage came again; brave and loving woman as she was, she felt that she could go through fire and water to procure for him a single moment's happiness.

"Memory," he read, "is a blessed gift of God. To be able to go back in mind over the seasons which are past, to recall scenes in which we have taken part, friends with whom we have companied, hopes which since have fructified or possibly have come to nothing, even though the retrospect has as much of sorrow as of happiness in it—is nevertheless anything but an unpleasant task.

"Nevertheless, memory to the wicked must be an ever present punishment; and they do what they can to escape from it, to kill time, to banish thought. Yet, however much a man may be engrossed by sin, by unbelief, by

worldliness, unwelcome reminiscences of the past will perforce obtrude themselves. He looks back, and a dark and hideous retrospect presents itself, as he marks the gradual process by which his heart has arrived at its present sad condition; he observes, when too late, perhaps, the land marks of his fall, the milestones upon the broad road, the unheeded reproofs, the neglected warnings, the despised inspirations, the broken vows. Perhaps, his erratic thoughts may wander back yet further, to the time when he was an innocent, happy child, when his mind was not tortured by sin or unbelief, when he trusted and was obedient. But his mind quickly recoils again from the unwelcome vision, and he once more rushes into the world around him to pursue some phantom light as it glides through the dismal darkness of pleasure, of avarice, or ambition.

“But how different are the effects of memory on the just, as they recall the irrevocable past; irrevocable, because it can

never be acted over again. Not one single thought we think can we recall, not one single word we speak can we unsay, not one single action we perform can we undo ; and therefore, as the just man looks back upon his past life, he will remember many clouds which have at times blackened the heavens, and hid the beams of that shining light which is now ever advancing more and more until the perfect day ; clouds of sorrow, clouds of unbelief, clouds of temptation, clouds of sin ; and yet he will be able to feel that his memory is a blessing to him. The record of his sins will be also a record of God's mercy and forgiveness ; the record of his very falls will be to him also a record of renewed grace, strength, and God-given perseverance, by which he was enabled to rise again and to conquer ; while the record of his griefs will be the record also of those seasons when he had felt that God was nearest to him, and had realized most fully in his heart the reality of the promise, 'Lo, I am with you always.' Truly while we are yet alive, the

memory of the just is blessed, blessed to himself."

As soon as Reginald A'Bear had finished reading, he closed the manuscript, and looking out of the window again, remarked—

"I know that all which I have just read is true, and yet I don't seem altogether to realize it, I think that notwithstanding all I have to look back upon in my past life, I ought to be a happier, more grateful man than I am. It was only just as you were coming in that I was repeating to myself those sad words of Sir Walter Scott, as I was looking at this lovely view—

"The sun upon the Weirlaw hill,
In Ettrick's vale, is sinking sweet,
The Westland wind is hushed and still,
The lake lies sleeping at my feet;
Yet not the landscape to mine eye,
Bears those bright hues that once it bore,
Though evening with her richest dye,
Flames o'er the hills of Ettrick's shore.

With listless look along the plain
I see Tweed's silver current glide,
And coldly mark the holy fane
Of Melrose rise in ruined pride;
The quiet lake, the balmy air,
The hill, the stream, the tower, the tree,
Are they still such as once they were,
Or is the dreary change in me?"

It was now Gertrude Sinclair's turn to speak—

"Reggie," she said timidly, and as she commenced, her heart seemed to give a great leap within her, "don't you think those times may perhaps come back again some day, and things may look as once they did?"

There was something in the tone of her voice which made him quickly turn round and look inquiringly into her face. Now, Gertrude Sinclair was one of those straightforward persons who, truthful as the day, only know of one method of sailing, with the helm pointing in the same direction as the vessel; tacking was an art in conversation which she had never paid much attention to; and if her voice quivered a little, and the mantling colour began to rush into her face, her eye met her cousin's glance without flinching, as she commenced to tell him the object of her coming into the library—love had made her strong.

"I hope you won't be angry with me or

despise me for what I am going to say," she commenced.

"Angry with *you*, despise *you*, *you* of all people in the world," he exclaimed. "What do you mean? you know that it is impossible." But at the same time wondered very much what was about to be the nature of Gertrude Sinclair's confessions.

"I shan't keep you in suspense very long," she continued as calmly as she could. "Mother has just given me this ring," holding out her left hand as she spoke; "she would put it on to my hand herself. I took it off once, but she persisted, and said that dear Lucy, just before she died, had told her to give it to me, and ask me to wear it for her sake; and she made me promise to come down at once, and ask you if I might keep it there, and say that it is her wish also. I know that I am not worthy to be compared with her in any way, but I will try to take her place, and make you happy once again."

As soon as she had spoken, and saw the

look of extreme surprise depicted on every lineament of her cousin's countenance, her courage left her, her eyes fell, and she stood trembling before him with her head bent; while Reginald, though her meaning flashed upon him directly the glitter of the ruby ring caught his eye, was so taken by surprise that he could find no answer for a few moments. And so she continued standing before him for a time, neither speaking. At length Gertrude Sinclair broke the painful silence, and as the tears rose into her eyes, and sparkled through the long lashes, she said with quivering lip and faltering, but gentle voice, as she prepared to leave the room again—

“I did not wish to come. I knew you would despise me”

“Despise you?” he exclaimed, hastily rising and finding his tongue, for her plaintive voice had penetrated to his inmost heart. “Despise you, Gerty? Do you think I know you so little as not to understand the violence you

must have done to your feelings before you promised mother to come ; that nothing but the highest, noblest, purest motives could ever have carried you through with it ? No ! Gerty, no ! I was merely taken by surprise, that was all. I honour you more than ever, if that be possible ; it is just on a par with your whole life, one long succession of acts of loving-kindness and self-denial. This, then, must have been her plan for rewarding you. She told me one day that she would never be happy until she had shown her gratitude. I understand it all now ; and if you value the rest of this poor shattered life, of this seared, oft-wounded heart, you are welcome to it. I cannot promise you more affection than I have to bestow ; but all I have is yours from this day forward, if you will accept of it. Yes ! Go and tell mother that you may wear the ring for the sake of little Lux, and for my sake, too, if you will ; ” and then added, as he took her unresisting hand, and put it gently to his lips, “ I am sure in this instance,

at any rate, it must be true, *ce que femme veut, Dieu veut.*"

Almost immediately afterwards Mrs. Adams entered the library, and before very long they were seated, Reginald in the open window, and the two ladies on an ottoman close by; while Gerty told them some of the hidden struggles of her life during the past few years, after Mrs. Adams had narrated Lucy's conversation with her, of her dear child's wish, which would now, she thanked God, be fulfilled. She then left Reginald and Gerty, whom she now loved more than ever as her own children, alone once more; and when she retired to her own room that night it seemed to her as though little Lux must have been hovering around them, for though there still was sadness among them, they had felt happier that day, and there had been a greater look of sober joy upon their faces than at any previous time since her daughter's death. As soon as they were alone together, Reginald asked—

“How long have you loved me, Gerty?”

“I never remember the time when I did not,” she replied. “I always seemed to have different feelings towards you than towards any one else. I think I must have loved you ever since I was quite a little girl, from the time when no one else used to take much notice of me, and you used to take me on your lap, and try and make me understand the pictures in the great Bible at Uncle Ralph’s. After you had left, I used to go upstairs into the school room, and have a good cry, and begin at once to count the weeks until you would come again. But it was from the day you saved my life that I first knew for certain that no one could ever be the same to me as you were.”

“And yet you came and nursed Lucy?” Reginald answered, looking at her with eyes that were full of the highest esteem, the deepest gratitude, and the tenderest affection; with such feelings in his heart, love could not be very long in taking root there also.

"I could do no less," she answered, "when you had set me the example, by nursing O'Connor in the Crimea."

"You knew, then, that I once loved Lorna O'Connor?"

"Yes," she replied, "love is quick in learning the state of the heart of those we love."

"We shall have no secrets, then," he rejoined. "My heart, I fear, will be a poor exchange for yours."

"I am content," she said pressing his hand to her heart, "with what you can give me, and I shall have it all some day."

That same afternoon they took a long walk together; and as they were returning, though the sun was setting, and the gloom of the coming darkness was beginning to cast a shadow over the scenery upon which he had been gazing in the morning, it seemed to him as though to his eyes, at any rate, a change for the better had already commenced to appear in the landscape around; as though it was beginning again to wear those bright

hues with which it had once been decked, and which he thought only that very morning had vanished for ever.

During the following summer, the wedding took place at Bearcroft, a very quiet one; and for the first time since their first meeting in South Devon, so many years before, as merry lads and lasses, Hugh A'Bear, engaged to be married to a rich and childless widow, Edric Maitland and Winnifred, Charles O'Connor and Lorna, Reginald A'Bear and his bride, all met together again under the same roof.

In the afternoon, when the bride and bridegroom had departed on their wedding tour, as Winnifred Maitland and her husband were walking in the garden, she mentioned the fact, and asked him if he remembered saying to her, as he was helping her over the rocks—

“ ‘ When shall we seven meet again ? ’ ”

“ No,” he replied, “ but you women always remember these sort of things, long after we men have forgotten all about them.”

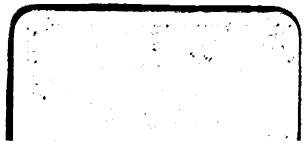
“ Don’t you remember my answer either ?
‘ Never, perhaps, or not until we are all staid
old men and women.’ ”

“ No, I have no recollection of the circum-
stance whatever ; but many strange things
have taken place since then.”

“ Yes,” she responded, “ but you men have
poor memories.”

THE END.





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